

Season 3 EP1

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SPEAKERS

Monique Curry-Mims, Valerie Johnson, Kia Jarmon

Valerie Johnson 00:00

Hello, and welcome to Beyond philanthropy, it is 2023 brand new year brand new season and brand new topic. So for 2023, we're talking about disrupting systems and systemic disruption in philanthropy. And I'm here with Monique as usual.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:17

Hello!

Valerie Johnson 00:18

And we have what I think is the perfect guest for this topic to help us really set the stage for what we're going to talk about throughout the rest of this year. So I had the pleasure of hearing a keynote speech done by Kia Jarmon, who is our guest today, back in the fall and immediately was like you need to be on our podcast. So thankfully, she agreed. And I also want to point out that she is setting really strict hard boundaries around self care and rest this season. And she is not officially back to work. And so she made a huge exception on our behalf. So thank you for doing that. Because we all need to learn to protect our time and our sanity the way that Kia is so impressed. So without further ado, I'm going to let Kia introduce herself. So I do not butcher any of her background because it is extensive. And I do not want to mess it up. So Kia, welcome.

Kia Jarmon 01:12

Thank you so much for having me. Happy New Year, first of all.

Valerie Johnson 01:15

Happy New Year

Kia Jarmon 01:16

I'm saying that I'm going to say that until March. That's usually my you know,

Valerie Johnson 01:20

Is it?

Kia Jarmon 01:20

yes until March because I don't know who I've seen. It's also because the pandemic, we're going back in the upswing of COVID. And so you know, I don't see people I'm like, Oh, have I seen you in this year. So I will keep doing that until March. But I'm Kia Jarmon, I'm based out of Nashville, Tennessee, and I have a variety of hats that I wear. I'm a born entrepreneur. So the foundation of my life is entrepreneurial innovation, risk taking, thinking outside of boxes, dismantling the box, whatever I can do. For the past 16 years, I have led a consultancy called MEPR agency. And we are a boutique communications and community engagement team working really to make sure that people with particularly within marginalized communities have access to high level information in nonprofit and government processes. So when you think about large strategic plans with your city, so meaning your city has to plan to grow, to plan to maneuver through all of the challenges that we have in cities, whether it's transportation, or park systems, or water, or what have you, and help make sure that those conversations get brought to everyone. And not just individuals who get who read the newspaper, or watch TV or who can sit through academic lectures because that's very often what we how we present information is through very academic level conversations. And so that's one side of my life. The other side, it's kind of two parts. One is leading something called the nonprofit equity collaborative, where I support nonprofit leaders of color who are looking to build their capacity and move from personality driven organizations to real sustainable organizations. And what that really means breaking that down is that very often black and brown leaders are doing the great work of their community. And when they're looking to get funded for that they're often not provided with funds, because they don't have some of the infrastructure. And so supporting them through infrastructure development as a leader, and then also as an organization. So they really can move out and either pass the organization on to the next person and leadership. And so that it's not ultimately just riding on their backs. And then the kind of other book end to that is leading a black philanthropy initiative here in Nashville, co leading that called give Black give back. And our first initiative is with in collaboration with our Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, and really ensuring that people understand the more than \$11 billion treasure that black households give, and also that we give in the other the other five T's as well, time talent, of course, Treasurer truth and testimony and I co-lead that with Lisa swift young. And you know, again, our goal really is to make sure that people understand systemically why we assume that black people don't have access to money. There's there's a huge assumption there, but the data reflects something different. And then I mean, the money like ultimately, the money, you can trace it and see how much we're giving. But it is beneficial to many in philanthropy, and in the nonprofit industrial complex to make assumptions that black people don't give money.

Monique Curry-Mims 04:31

Talk about it!

Kia Jarmon 04:31

because they continue to keep them in places of just being recipients and not givers. And so I often ask organizations, and I'll do this challenge here as organizational leaders. Do you have a black philanthropy fundraising plan? And very often the answer is no. And they wouldn't necessarily say they have a white fundraising plan. But when you look at their fundraising community, their donor

community, not just foundations and large funds, but even Individual give donors, they are going to largely be white and they're old. And so they will die. So we have to create new ways of thinking, because the people are there. So we need to create new ways of thinking. So that's, those are kind of the buckets of work that I'm currently doing. And it all works really well together. It seems like you know, always seems like it's a lot, but it all works really well together and flows really well together with my overall mission to make sure that people are, you know, able to thrive and heal and live their best life. And you can only do that when you have a strong system to support you doing that.

Monique Curry-Mims 05:42

You are a woman after my own heart. I don't know how we didn't connect sooner. The work you're doing is amazing on every level. And I like I said, just I know a lot of people and even like my husband, you doing all these things, I'm like yes, but they all fit together, right? Like, they're all these different facets that that work cohesively together. But I do want to take a moment and go back. Because you know, as Valerie said, like our theme this year is systemic change. And you started talking about the nonprofit industrial complex in how funders think that, you know, black people or even like black nonprofits just aren't deserving, or just don't have. So can you just kind of talk to like the root and the history of the nonprofit industrial complex and why people think that way?

Kia Jarmon 06:33

Yeah. So first, I guess let's define nonprofit industrial complex. And um, this is not like the scientific version, you can go Google, I always say Google is very free and available. But really what the nonprofit industrial complex is, is is a system of people. So there's usually nonprofits, government, and some private folks who are sitting around ensuring that there are some of us who get a chance to thrive, and some of us who are always in survival mode. And so the nonprofits that are working to be mission driven, are often driven by funders. And that's usually either government, whether it's local, state, or federal, or some large foundation that is pulling the purse strings. As a matter of fact, there was an organization I was working with, and I asked them, I said, Who told you this was the mission that this community needed? Who told you this, which was what should be solving for and what they what the leader told me was the funders, the funders told us this was what needed? You know, black children need mentoring in the community? Why did they tell you that? And so that's kind of to give us some framework, every community of people every faith, every you know, the origin stories of our of our being whatever or store, you believe, will have some version of benevolence, generosity, charity, involved. How you give from your heart, how you take care of your fellow man, that type of language, you'll see threaded in lots of in lots of information, how you know, there, there are lots of ways in which we get started. Religion usually is one of those ways. So I'm not going to dig super deeply. But what I will say is that at the foundation of philanthropy is people wanting to do well, to keep themselves in a certain position and keep others in another position. So I, the example I often give is about the men who funded historically black colleges and universities. And so I asked that I believe the session I was even in with Valerie, where I was talking about philanthropy, at the AFP for Philadelphia. The question I asked is, why would white men want to fund historically black colleges and universities? And so there are a number of good reasons. One of the reasons is because you get a chance to you get a chance to control the labor, you get a chance to control the industry. As a matter of fact, I believe they would say, do they call Andrew Carnegie the father of industry? And so how do you become the father of industry, you manage the industries? And so we have to, we have to really get to the origin of why people are

interested in keeping some people down and why we're interested in keeping some people you know, ahead. This is all based out of white supremacy. To be very explicit, that there are some people who believe that white is supreme, above all and it's a specific type of white too, it's not every white. You still have to be

Monique Curry-Mims 09:42

Making it clear.

Kia Jarmon 09:43

Yeah, you have to be with it. So this is the this was a white people you also get the bad fruit from racism and oppression and all the systems of harm, because you're not you're also not included the Hello game, and you're not included in the conversation either. Whether You want to be or not, that's not really isn't for you, because you're not straight, you are not in certain degreed, you are not, I mean, there's a certain type of you need to look a certain way, you need to have a certain type of child, you need to have a certain type of religious background. And so that's those are the origins of how we get to this version of philanthropy. You look at the nonprofit community 80 to 90%, depending on the industry, is led by white women. 80 to 90% of those people who are constituents of those organizations are black and brown young people, or families, how mismatched is that? We can do identity based philanthropy, right, we are informed enough to take care of our own people, as a matter of fact, when you look at the continent of Africa, and really all of the continents that if you go back to their indigenous practices, they all have community that they can take care of. We don't need this Americanized version of philanthropy. That tells us that, you know, black people, and darker melanated people do not have capacity to manage themselves and do well. I hope that answers your question. Because I know we rolled around. that we're operating within. And it's, it's, it's bigger than this, you know, it's larger than this conversation, right? I mean, I'm sure you know, there's resources and things that you all will share with your, with your listeners. But there are it's a big system, and they're all interconnected. And I think about it like a tree, the roots of a tree are deep. And so we cut down the tree, and we think we've gotten rid of the problem. And reality is there are so many things under the surface that we haven't even addressed. And so when you look at things like poverty as an example, and so we think we cut down the tree of poverty, which is often what organizations do when they when they start to do mixed income communities or when they start to gentrify communities, they say, we're going to disrupt how poverty works, because we're gonna create some new programs, some new affordable housing program or something, to get more people in a community, what the root of that is deep, those systems of oppression go deeper. So racism as an as a huge example, is a reason. So you can give people classes and training and even give them downpayment, assistance, all these things, but they're all these other systems that affect the root of why they're unable to be successful. And so what the blame is, is well see, we gave them all of this stuff, and they still can't be successful. So it's on them. Because a tenet of white supremacy, if you follow the tenets of white supremacy, a Tema Okun has a great list of of them, one of those in its is going to be individualism. And so we think the person did something wrong. And we never look, again, using the tree analogy at the roots, that has spread the bad soil that extend to every part of our life. That's, you know, just hopefully an example for people of like, how deep systems work and how the nonprofit industrial complex and philanthropy work together.

Monique Curry-Mims 11:26

Right.

Valerie Johnson 13:15

No, that was amazing. And I remember during your keynote speech, it was it was largely white women in the room. And you touched on the HBCUs being funded by white businessmen, and you know, that giving them a lot of control over how the industry was created, and how the industry grew. I remember seeing faces in the audience, they were just looking at you like, Oh, my God, it's like, they just never thought what was in it for the white men that were providing the funding? And, you know, I think a lot of times people don't think that far into it. They're just like, oh, isn't that a great thing that Carnegie wanted to, you know, fund libraries, and this person wanted to fund HBCUs. But you're right, in that there is always a benefit to them in some way to be providing that large funding or, you know, I think always but definitely back then when philanthropy was first building, its you know, Americanized roots. So a lot of fellow fundraisers after that presentation, were just kind of like mind, mind blown, couldn't even carry a conversation after that. They were just kind of like, wow, I, my whole, my whole industry, everything I do, everything I stand for is affected by this, and, and needing to take some time to digest that. So it's, it's important for people to really understand, especially if you work in philanthropy, like what what it is that you do and when, what roots you're standing on in order to have this position and have this job and what you're pushing forward.

Kia Jarmon 14:48

Absolutely. I mean, part of the conversation we were having was about innovation. And you know, very frankly, if we talk about what innovation in this country looks like it is usually going to be black and indigenous people who I have made a great amount of inventions that have innovated something. So there was a problem and issue and someone had to solve it. And who could take it to market is usually white men, because they either could get there quicker, they could pay for it, they could create the the patent, they could go to the law office, they could do something that would allow them to put their name on it. And so we have used language like innovation or even language like philanthropy, but we're using that language, but it really is meaning an extension of white supremacy. And we really have to call out that you're not necessarily needing to invent your reinvent your own thing, or we innovate your own thing. There are already people doing that. And you need to couple behind those people who are doing the work again, mostly black and indigenous people, brown people, people who've had to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, all of these things that this kind of very Americanized language, make \$1 out of 15 cent having to do those type of things, you know, those individuals have been doing this for hundreds of years. So couple with them, trust them, to know what their community needs very often we throw money into the community when there's a crisis. So, you know, we're still in the middle of COVID 19. And we're about to go back into the upswing, but hopefully, you know, hopefully, we are smarter about our learnings. when COVID was happening. So in Nashville, you know, we had a few things, we had a tornado that hit right before COVID. So I believe it was March 3 2020, then COVID was happening, but nope, we were all thinking is this, this the flu, we didn't know. And then that happens, COVID happens. And then a few months later, December of 2020, I believe we had an RV suicide, which also ended up harming lots of people in our downtown community. So we had a whole, like what I would call a terrorist attack in the middle of our downtown community. So we had a lot of things happening. So organizations were just throwing money in the community, that is also not trust based philanthropy, you know, just throwing money at black and brown folks with no real clear idea of how to

support them sustainably after, because you give the organization a windfall of money, and they start to create expenses based on that money, then what happens next year, when I still need the money, because I still got the expenses, right? So we're still harming organizations by just throwing them into like throwing the money at them, you all can't see it. So Monique and I are having like, the headnod of confirmation, and I appreciate that not because confirmation, but because we all know what this feels like to know, to see organizations throwing the money at the community, and then not having any sustainability plan for them. And then again, as I mentioned before, having the See, we knew they couldn't do it, we knew they weren't able to do, that's the system that we're operating in, that's the cycle that we're operating in, of constantly having to prove that we're worthy, then you throw money at us because we're the closest to the problem, or the people. And then when the problem is over, we don't see you again, you're gone, like that is so unsustainable, so unhealthy, and it's actually super harmful. I'm not saying don't give money for this, I don't want that to be the message because people will say, well, then we just won't give money. No, what I'm saying is one, give money when we're not in the middle of a crisis. To help build up the capacity, what I'm saying is, you know, capacity building is a buzzword that we're moving beyond that, um, but we're still living in it. So I want to make sure we use I'm using language that people understand, but how do we build up the organization's capacity, then when there's crisis, you can support them through the crisis, so they can they can do their business. And then you can also support them after what philanthropy is what we try to in the work that we do here in Nashville, and even beyond, what we're trying to make sure people get beyond is charity, which is keeping people in their condition and get them to philanthropy, which is supporting people getting out of their condition, which means you're gonna have to do some looking at yourself and some inventory of what it is that you've done, sometimes individually, sometimes organizationally, and sometimes within your industry to understand what it is that that has happened that keeps this you know, cycle going. And so we really want to we utilize Desmond Tutu's, quote and analogy around the throwing the baby in the water, if you will. And at some point, someone needs to go upstream and say, Who's throwing you know, who keeps throwing them in the water for me, I say who keeps pushing them in? Because it's, it's a jolt. It's not just a you know, a gentle drop into a stream of water. This is that people are being constantly pushed into harmful conditions, particularly when your individual self is being called out. So when you individually have to do some reflection, see we're all allies. Right? really honest, and I don't believe in ally ship. So just to be clear, but we're all allies in the work when we're giving out like awards and we're giving out titles, but we're not allies in the work when it starts saying how do you look at your own self and the things that you've done and how it's been harmful and it's required for all of us to do it's require for us to do black and brown people is required of us to do an LGBTQ plus community is required of us to do of women is required of us it is required of us to look at ourselves introspectively and everybody's following when it's like we're talking about that organization or that business or that company or those people over there. It's not fun we have to sit with ourselves and really have a conversation about how our charity mind which is how do I keep people in the condition is really harming my community.

Monique Curry-Mims 20:52

Yes, thank you for hitting the nail on the head with that.

Valerie Johnson 20:57

And then some.

Monique Curry-Mims 20:57

And then some right I'm like, we're trying to keep these episodes shorter but I don't know if we can do that.

Valerie Johnson 21:02

No because I want to dive into like the why you don't believe in ally ship but that is

Monique Curry-Mims 21:06

That's a whole other conversation.

Valerie Johnson 21:07

we'll talk about that offline. Because like,

Monique Curry-Mims 21:12

we really quickly really like this give us this give us like a line or two, like why do you not believe in ally ship?

Kia Jarmon 21:17

Yeah, because it's situational. And when people what I what I've seen 100% time and time again is that people are allies in bio in, in the trainings, but not when it really counts. There's a professor Dr. Bettina Love, and she has a video I believe it's on like the CNBC or CNN or something like that anyway, but she does this really great six minute video about ally ship versus coconspirators ship. And she explains that, that there was there was a city where of many cities where they were taking down some of those Confederate flags. And in this particular city, they were gonna have a black woman take the flag down, people had taught her how to take the flag down all of these things she was gonna it was

Monique Curry-Mims 22:01

Take that shit down.

Valerie Johnson 22:01

Right!

Monique Curry-Mims 22:01

They had to teach her how to take the flag, though?

Kia Jarmon 22:06

but what I mean is they were it was it whatever it was, was a group of folks who were like, Okay, I'm gonna teach you how to climb I'm gonna it was whatever. And she wanted to do with fine, let her be let her live and live and let live, not my ministry, but that's her ministry. And I support that. And so she was going to take it down. And so what happened was when the moment came the police and everybody is around, and the police, we're going to tase the pole. And so you know what happens? Right? You tase metal, I mean, what's gonna happen, it's going to reverberate up to the person. So this group of folks, so the allies are behind the fence yelling at the police officer.

Monique Curry-Mims 22:41

But they're not blocking the poll.

Valerie Johnson 22:45

oh, my god

Kia Jarmon 22:45

well, coconspirator puts his hand on the pole. And so he knew the white, the white police officer would not do it. And he didn't. And she was able to come down. I give that example, when are you willing to put yourself in a harmful position to support me. And so the ally ship that I've seen is cool, when I can show up to the March, but not also be pepper sprayed. I go home and watch it on the news. I was there I had a sign. But I'm back at the house. And somebody has been we had several people here who were arrested black folks who were arrested for being down at our state capitol, you know, who's voting rights were being were about to be rescinded. Because they were doing what white folks do, which is also show up at these places. I'm saying this to say until we what happens is we give a name to something which is the challenge we give name to something, it then becomes whitewashed. And so we take that, like ally ship, and we say can I you know, Can I can I put it on my resume? Can I get a sticker or a badge and put it someplace? That is not what ally ship is?

Monique Curry-Mims 24:01

Right.

Kia Jarmon 24:02

So I refuse to contribute to it. So I say things like this, I don't believe in it. And then we have these guidelines, dialogues, and people can start to see themselves hopefully, in a more coconspirators to relationship with other people, where it really is about my life is always 100% on the line. I'm a black woman who's the mother of a black son. My life has that 100% always unsafe 100% And when I call out because I'm calling out white supremacy because I'm calling it out, my life is unsafe. And so your title doesn't protect my black life. And so that it I'm very passionate about that because I saw it happen. I was talking about this before 2020. So this is not a 2020 thing. And I also in 2020 saw all the folks waving the flag of I want to now take the classes. You know listen to all the great podcasts, right. It's great listening. But there has to be more work. If ally ship is a verb, then it has to be action. So what action Have you taken? So this is my challenge, what action Have you taken to actually make sure that other people's lives are no longer, you know, filled with harm and violence and disruption? That's something to ask yourself.

Monique Curry-Mims 25:30

That's, that's, that's deep, happy new year that is

Valerie Johnson 25:34

Happy new year.

Monique Curry-Mims 25:34

All right. Ask yourself that, start your new year off, right? And ask yourself that. I just want to hop back on topic. I mean, even though we're on topic, but in our membership podcast, we're going to zip dig a little deeper into this and really talk about systems mapping, just high level really quickly, like what are your thoughts on how nonprofits can figure out where they fit within this system to either break it or to make sure that they are helping the people that they're serving maneuver through this system?

Kia Jarmon 26:10

Okay. So my response to that is going to be for nonprofits to slow down? Not quite the maybe answer you were looking for. But let me explain. In my experience with nonprofit and I've worked with lots of nonprofits, I've also worked for nonprofits, but I mostly now represent nonprofits is that the the reason why you can't understand the system that you operate in, let alone navigate it is because you haven't spent the time being more investigative about where you sit. Time is important because it's it also urgency of time is also another tenant of white supremacy, because we are forced to quickly move through the year quickly move through the funding cycle, quickly move through what the grantor needs, I mean, we're moving fast. If we sat, slow down your programming, I'm not saying quit your program. And I'm certainly not saying be harmful to anyone in your programming. But don't add no new programs, that's what I'm gonna say, sit with yourself. Sit with your yourself, your staff, your team, your board, because your board, usually what happens is that the organization will bring me in, but the board is not quite there, or the board or bring me in and the organization is not quite there. But both have to come together. This takes time 18 to 24 months. I mean, it takes a lot of time. But really sit and begin to ask, you can ask simply why three times. So if you're looking at the root cause of something, and you're looking at the history, I mean, get as deep as you can get about the history, oh, this is why this happens. This is why an organization leads this way. You can't break what you don't define. So earlier, I was like, well, let's define nonprofit and cultural conflicts. Let's stop using these words. weaponizing them and then not giving people the tools. So go deep, find out at the very root, what's happening. Once you get to the root of those things, then you can begin to figure out what the system is that you want to push away. Right? Or would you want to break up?

Monique Curry-Mims 28:22

Valerie, do you have any last minute questions, ideas, thoughts before we wrap?

Valerie Johnson 28:29

No, I just I think what I want to say is like, Thank you for giving us such a thought provoking first episode, because there's so much to think about and reflect on and it's the perfect time because it's a new year, so 2023 we can really start to reflect on how we are operating here in this philanthropy space and how we can potentially, you know, change the system or disrupt the system. So thank you that was i i feel like one of those white women in that keynote speech where I'm just like, wow, I can't even like process all of this right now. It's amazing.

Monique Curry-Mims 29:04

I love you.

Kia Jarmon 29:06

I love what you all are doing I mean so much. And the thing about I talk to this I talk about this with my the medical students that I train about system work is think about you need a ritual for for this work because it will also be overwhelming. So in the medical industry, there's you know, those doctors who go into the, into the hospital or into their own private practice. You also have two other industries you have the pharmaceutical industry and the insurance industry. Those are other systems that also operate. I'm just giving an example here. And so you will become tired in your system change work, because as soon as you come up from that iceberg because iceberg is super deep, right? So you see the surface and you got the 1000s of things under it. As soon as you come up, you're gonna then be hit with, you know the insurance company that says No, we can't do that, or the pharmaceutical company says, Here's shoved this, this medicine down, you know, the black person or the brown person's throat, because this is what they should take for their issue. And so you will become overwhelmed. And so particularly if you're black and brown in this work, I'm highly encouraging you to create ritual for how you will make sure that you have your own healing practice, and your own self care that hopefully moves into communal care practice this work because otherwise, it will become very overwhelming, you'll become burnt out. And what we've seen is particularly in the pandemic is high levels of depression, high levels of suicide, because people are, are not necessarily having the opportunity to tools to really support themselves in this burnout. That's not just oh, I'm tired. But it really is getting to the core of their kind of DNA engineering. And so I'm really just encouraging, again, black and brown folks to have some ritual of self care for themselves as they work because you're going to be the person that's called on to do some of the system change work, and to take up the conversation and to do some of the educating and things that you may not want to do. And I'm not even encouraging you to do them. I also want people to keep their jobs. So I just wanted to put that out there as well.

Monique Curry-Mims 31:15

No, thank you. I appreciate that. I think that is a great way to end our first episode of the year. So I want to thank you for speaking with us and joining us all the way from Tennessee. Really appreciate your time this morning. And if you didn't know now, you know this has been beyond philanthropy.