

Growing Democracy PODCAST

Visit us at: www.GrowingDemocracyOH.org/podcasts

- Ashley (Co-Host): Hi, I'm Ashley Nickels.
- Shemariah (Co-Host): And I'm Shemariah Arki.
- Casey (Co-Host): And I am Casey Boyd-Swan.
- Ashley (Co-Host): We're podcasting from Northeast Ohio. This is the Growing Democracy Podcast: a space to amplify multiple forms of knowledge, demystify politics, policy, and governance, and foster equity centered civic engagement.
- Shemariah (Co-Host): Each episode, we invite a guest or two to talk about what it means to be civically engaged, how engagement can be leveraged to dismantle systems of oppression, and how to grow a socially just and equitable democracy.
- Casey (Co-Host): Welcome to the show, and thanks for joining us.
- Ashley (Co-Host): So this episode is, in some ways, a relaunch, a, kind of, new, revised growing democracy podcast, and we wanted to do a - I think we're calling it episode 200, to talk a little bit about why. Why did we decide to update, enrich, enhance, change—
- Casey (Co-Host): Because our numbering system was weird.
- Ashley (Co-Host): Right? Who knows what we were doing in the past?
- Casey (Co-Host): We can blame it on the pandemic. Well, no, it's a really good question, though. We had so many different series and I think some people got confused about, is this a season? Is this a series? What does this mean? But it was really just that we kind of thought of this, I think in much— too much of a teacher/instructor kind of way where we had themes we were trying to stick to, but—
- Ashley (Co-Host): They're modules, I don't know what you're talking about. I have lesson plan modules and they're themes that came in.
- Casey (Co-Host): But really, there's an overarching, right, umbrella that connects everything, so why not relaunch? And we have, you know, now, a third, permanent co-host. Don't be hiding back there.
- Shemariah (Co-Host): Hey y'all, it's me.
- Ashley (Co-Host): So Shemariah, why did you agree to hang out with us on the podcast?

Shemariah (Co-Host): Umm... Okay. So, like, the real reason - the real, real reason - is because when I recorded the original episode, I was really comfortable, and I felt really comfortable being myself, and I felt like the space that you both had curated was safe, you know? Intellectually safe for us to come and have these conversations around these things that often create conflict. But being able to have conversation to agree, and to disagree, and then to end and be like, "Okay, I'll see you later!"

And then the next time that we were in community, it was not contentious. So, I believe that that's the "real" real reason, right? In addition to it being fun and me liking to talk about things like this all the time. But the space that you all had created was safe for someone like me, who wasn't fully in academia at that time, someone who was in community, who had a foot in both worlds, if you will, and really is intentionally speaking back to systems and institutions. So, I was excited when I was asked to join – forever.

Ashley (Co-Host): Yeah. So, maybe it's worth backing up and saying kind of what that history was. So, brought Dr. Arki on as a guest on the podcast, I want to say in 2000, maybe in 2021, I can't remember the timeline. And then in spring of 2021, we had an opportunity to collaborate for a funded, kind of special series on race and democracy in Northeast Ohio. And Casey and I knew that you would make a huge contribution to this work and not just to bring you in because we were talking about race, but because you had been on the podcast, because this is an area of expertise, because you live in community – or you are in community.

And, you know, one of the things that, on the flip side, you said we created this space that felt welcoming, I also think that all of the contributions that you made over the last year to two years have really shaped us. Or me, I'll speak for myself – have shaped my, kind of, approach to this work and shaped how I think about things. And so, it felt like such a great way of continuing to grow together, umm, and then making it official. You're not just part of a series that we were funded to do, but making it *part of* and actively involved in every aspect: the boring, nitty-gritty budgeting stuff to the big picture thinking stuff of what we do with the Growing Democracy Project and the podcast.

Casey (Co-Host): That's what I love so much about having Dr. Arki on here is that – she, like, the whole podcast is about trying to unpack stuff, but Shemariah, you unpack things in ways that I forgot because I packed it away so long ago that it's like, "Yeah, oh no, no, that's a really good– it was invisible to me that it was something that needed to be unpacked." So, umm, I just think that having you on the show brings a depth and, kind of, a third dimension to it that was missing.

Ashley (Co-Host): It completes our space.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Oh, thank you. And I want to say this too, and let the record show that, you know, I don't feel tokenized in this space; lots of places I do. No, they want you to show up because you're– you're the Black person, you're the person that's going to say the things that need to be said, you're the person that's not

affiliated with the institution, so to speak, on behalf of the community. You're the person from Africana Studies, you know, we're looking to you to tell us how all folks in the diaspora should react. And I don't feel that in this space and, umm, and that has to do with you all, right, and the renewal, as I was saying earlier. Yeah, we have an episode, we have a conversation, we have a budget chat, umm, and, you know, that's done.

And when we are showing up again, we're showing up renewed and ready to move forward, and that's so important in this work, and even in the time trajectory that you were talking about, Ashley. So, I believe that— was it during the pandemic? It might have been like maybe when the pandemic first hit that I was invited as a guest on the show, umm, and so lots of people had this, "Well, now that it's all over the TV, let's do something. Let's change our mission statement." Umm, and I don't feel like... Well, I know, that was never a conversation that we had in any of our planning meetings because it wasn't to say that we have to change this outward facing thing, like let's talk about it. It was just like, let's do it. This is what we're doing.

We don't have to talk about it. We know what to do. Umm, so I really, really appreciate that. And then, you know, just kind of giving me the space to, you know, do my thing, right? So, we did a film festival— like, I've *never* planned a film festival before, but being a creative and working with creatives in the community is something that I've always wanted to do. So, to be able to do that, umm, in community, test it on, try it out— and I think we were very successful as a team. So, umm, just really appreciative of this teaching and learning space that we have here. Umm, it's an excellent way to model, also, to the folks who join us in conversation and community around what this work could look like when we are well-intentioned and not afraid to do things differently than they've ever been done before.

Casey (Co-Host): Now, we did have two, as you mentioned, two in-person events last year, umm, one of them being— the biggest one being the film event. What do we have planned this year?

Ashley (Co-Host): Well, so this... Go ahead. Go ahead. You should take it.

Shemariah (Co-Host): This year, umm, in partnership with, again, the Center for Pan-African Culture and the Uumbaji Art Gallery, we are hosting a Photovoice Project. So, this is open to all members of our community: on campus, off campus, student, faculty, staff, family, friend, comrade, you name it. Anyone can submit to be a part of this. We're asking for folks to submit photos of what does race and democracy look like to you, umm, really, really broad because we want to, in our final exhibition, display what that looks like to a little bit of everybody in Northeast Ohio.

So, Photovoice submissions are open until November the 15th. Uhh, you can go on our website and find that information. We will choose the top 10 photos from all of those submitted. There is a selection committee, which includes us

and some students that we've been working with over the years. And they will be a part of a specific installation that I'll be co-curating in the Uumbaji Gallery here at Kent State University. So, calling, you know, artists, creatives, established, budding, however you're identifying. Students, we invite you to join us.

Casey (Co-Host): I love it. I'm excited to see—

Ashley (Co-Host): I'm super excited about this. Umm, this is, umm— If I'm remembering my notes correctly, the Photovoice Project actually emerged from a conversation, umm, that the three of us were having, and then Dr. Anuj Gurung was there as well. And Anuj was like, "I think a Photovoice project could compliment the film series really effectively and kind of build on this community engaged work that we're kind of envisioning for the Growing Democracy Project." Is my memory serving me correctly?

Casey (Co-Host): I remember that it was around the film festival and I honestly can't remember who it was that suggested it. I just remember saying, "Oh my gosh, that's a great idea." Mostly cause I feel like everybody has a camera on them now with their phone. So, who wouldn't want to participate in that? Like I can't draw, but I could take a photo.

Ashley (Co-Host): Right. And really just thinking about the intersection of the arts, and amplification, and the different mechanisms and tactics and ways that people can engage and help to shape these conversations, I think was part of the conversation. I hope I'm remembering—

Casey (Co-Host): Well, and I remembered that it was in relation to, uhh, Shooting Without Bullets, which was the first film that was screened. Umm, that, umm, you know, those kids— can you call them kids? They're not really kids, they're adults now.

Shemariah (Co-Host): They is good and grown these days.

Casey (Co-Host): But what they had created was just so remarkable, umm, and, you know, as someone who is not very artistic, I was really blown away by the work that was done there.

Shemariah (Co-Host): In the early days of Shooting Without Bullets, it was really focused, umm, on still photographs. Now they're digital media production. So, they've definitely expanded in the last five years. But really focusing on that and understanding where we are in our trajectory — and I mean we like, as a community, right — in how we are communicating. One thing that is happening right now is situating this podcast as a new literacy. This is a space where we can come together and pontificate, you know, with the best of them. So, how can we understand that this is a way in which we are able to code and decode the world, and, share?

You know, it's not a journal article, as the academy tells us, is, you know, the most important way that we are to disseminate information. But the people who

we often are writing about or conducting research on doesn't even have access to those journals! But with a podcast, you know, you open access to lots of different people at various intersections of making it accessible, but then also there's a point where we want to go live with these podcasts to create that dialogue in the moment. So, really understanding the power of the medium in which we're communicating in and being able to align the conversation, the discussion, the teaching and learning that's happening here, umm, is just as effective, *if not more* – you haven't done all the data yet, right – than, you know, taking this and putting it into a journal article.

Ashley (Co-Host): And can I also add that, you know, this is one of the ways that you have shaped the work even outside of being a host on the podcast. Right, so, introduce you as host, a– guest host on the podcast, now introducing you as, umm, a host on the podcast. But also shaping the broader project, the Growing Democracy Project, and then challenging us to– me, again, I don't know why I keep speaking for both of us, but challenging me–

Casey (Co-Host): It's both of us.

Ashley (Co-Host): As an academic who has always thought of this work as community engaged work, but seeing it as community engaged scholarship, right? That this is not just some service that I can tick off because it brings me joy to be able to create spaces like this and to be in community with people in ways like the podcast allows. Umm, but to see it as a contribution to our scholarship, umm, and to knowledge creation, umm, and I think you've really challenged me, in particular, to reframe how I approach this work. So, thank you for that.

Shemariah (Co-Host): You're welcome. We're a team!

Ashley (Co-Host): So, keep an eye out for conference proposals, all of that fun stuff. Umm, so we've talked a little bit about where we're at, where we're going, umm, and, you know, why all these changes are taking place. Umm, you know, what– to wrap this up to both Casey and Shemariah, where do you hope the podcast goes from here?

Casey (Co-Host): Well, I'm selfish so I hope that, you know, we get to keep meeting these kind of extraordinary people, or maybe they're ordinary people just doing extraordinary things. But you know me, I'm nosy, so I like to talk to people and just find out what are you doing, what are you about? Tell me everything about your life! And it's just, for me, a fantastic opportunity to, without going anywhere, learning so much about the world, umm, that I didn't know and I hope, you know, kind of provide a setting and a space for others to do the same who aren't in a position to personally meet people doing cool things. So, that's what I hope we get an opportunity to keep doing.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Yeah, I mean, with that, to continue, bringing people together across lines of difference, having more nuanced conversations. I'd really like to, umm, be

intentional about following up with past guests and see, umm, what they're doing that's new, fun, and exciting. I'd like to learn how our past guests are working together. I think that's really, really cool. So, whether, umm, they met through us or not, not necessarily measuring that, but just to see the alignment that's happening in community. Umm, I'm looking forward to more of that.

Ashley (Co-Host): I appreciate that and, you know, from our perspectives, sometimes we can see those threads and we see the network of overlapping interests and ideas and communities. Umm, but, you know, being able to build on that and make it explicit and honor it, umm, on the podcast. And for me... Go ahead.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah, I would also— like, I think it would be really cool if we could hear from some of our listeners about what they've changed or done as a result of listening to this podcast. Have they changed how they interact in their communities, right? Maybe they started volunteering at a community organization because they didn't know it was a thing and then they heard something. So, I think that would be really cool to do follow up with our guests, but also follow up with our listeners. How has, umm, listening to this kind of offered up a new experience for you to change something?

Ashley (Co-Host): And so for me, I think, umm, one of the comments we received from a listener, umm, was that we approach democracy from a— as an act, we see democracy as an action. It is a way of being in community, umm, and so for me, I think, you know, continuing to have those conversations, uhh, that center democracy around the lived experiences of how people engage with the world around them. Umm, those engagements that bring them joy and those engagements that seek to, you know, create more equitable systems, whatever it might be, that we continue to kind of center — and of course, this is coming from my own worldview and my own idea about democracy.

But how we demonstrate through our conversations and the way that we structure the podcast that democracy is an act, umm, and in order to foster democracy or grow democracy like the podcast is named, umm, we need to seek social justice. We need to seek equitable community engagement, we need to understand politics and governance, and so for me, it's really exciting to continue those conversations, umm, with y'all and with everyone throughout Northeast Ohio and abroad. I suppose we've had many episodes that are not just Northeast Ohio, but are talking and speaking to many of the issues people are experiencing in Northeast Ohio.

Casey (Co-Host): Ashley, before we go, do we want to preview the next three episodes?

Ashley (Co-Host): Absolutely. Let's go ahead and do that. Umm, so I can speak to the first episode that will come out, as we mentioned. They're going to be numbered in the 200s now. Kind of, the last two years will be in the 100s. We have a two part series, 201, part one and part two on two Shakers. Really talking about suburban histories and contemporary experiences and using Shaker Heights, Ohio as— kind of a context or a geography in which some of these histories and contemporary

experiences of, umm, oppression as they manifest through education and housing and policing manifest in a place like Shaker that is— espouses a social justice, racial equity, umm, kind of— promotion. I don't know how to say it.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Definitely. That's it. And I think that for our listeners that are familiar with the history of Shaker Heights, y'all know what we're getting at. For folks who are not, umm, there's a book by Celeste Ng called *Little Fires Everywhere*, and they actually made a Netflix series about it too. So, this is public information that anyone can access, you know I like that. But then also to really trouble the conversation, we're hearing this one perspective that's coming out.

And now with Celeste's work, we're hearing this other perspective. And so, part one and part two, we actually hear a few more perspectives, right— folks' lived experience, folks who are routinely called to represent the city, and then folks who are never called to represent the city. So, it's really interesting, and as we talk about this intersection of, you know, race, democracy, place and space, all these intersections, to really think critically around suburban histories and contemporary experiences.

Casey (Co-Host): Yes, there's—

Ashley (Co-Host): And then the next episode is hosted by Casey and Shemariah, so I'll let you two kind of, uhh, promo that episode.

Casey (Co-Host): Yeah. So episode 202, I was referring to as “Cleveland in the Classroom,” but that's their tagline is infusing Cleveland into the classroom where it was presented as, you know, teaching the history of Cleveland in a way that more equitably, umm, displays prominent players. Is that fair to say that, Shemariah?

Shemariah (Co-Host): Yeah. I would say, like, historically prominent players.

Casey (Co-Host): That aren't just old, dead white guys.

Shemariah (Co-Host): Correct. And even with that conversation, so thinking about the historical aspect, but there's no way that we can talk about the historical aspect without the sociopolitical context, umm, that happened in history for those particular folks. Umm, and then today, we had to talk about, if we're talking about teaching history, we got to talk about who's teaching it, right, and how they're teaching it and where they're teaching it at. So really, we are embarking on these conversations too, umm— I was in a space with Dr. Angela Y. Davis last week and her interviewer asked her a question and she said, “Well, we have to trouble the question a little bit.” So, I believe that we are in this space where we're troubling the question, right, we're troubling the topic by really looking at it from an intersectional perspective.

Ashley (Co-Host): And then, uhh, the last upcoming — we have many more coming down the road — but the next one that is planned, recorded, and getting ready to drop, umm, is

hosted by me and Casey and I think we're calling it The People's Budget because Michelle B. Jackson, one of the guests of the podcast, specifically says, uhh, that she really likes the term, "the people's budget." And talking about, kind of, these mechanisms of inclusive and empowered governing spaces, like what are the structures look like, and specifically investigating, kind of, the promise and the challenges of participatory budgeting, specifically in Cleveland.

Casey (Co-Host): Right. Yeah. So, maybe a nerdy episode talking about budgets, but I promise there's no spreadsheets that we reference, no Excel you have to look at. Uhh, really just a discussion of, you know, how budgeting decisions get made in a framework where those who are historically and typically excluded from the process do get to have, in fact, some, umm, control over it and what that has looked like in the setting of Cleveland. And we do give a bit of an intro talking about participatory budgeting at-large and the efficacy and value of it.

Ashley (Co-Host): Yeah, so— and those are what you can expect, uhh, kind of, with the relaunch, renewed— I don't know, what are we calling it?

Casey (Co-Host): Renewed, yeah, sure.

Ashley (Co-Host): Next season—

Shemariah (Co-Host): Season two.

Ashley (Co-Host): Of the podcast. And so we look forward to, you know, continuing these conversations.

Casey (Co-Host): Thanks for listening to The Growing Democracy Podcast. Our podcast is edited by Jeremy Demry at Golden Ox Studio right here in Cleveland, Ohio. This podcast is supported by the Center for Pan-African Culture and the School of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kent State University, with additional support from Mark Lewine and the John Gray Paynther Program. If you like our show and want to know more, check out our website, growingdemocracyoh.org. If you want to support the podcast as well as get access to behind the scenes content, live chat, and swag featuring designs by Donuts and Coffee, head over to patreon.com/growingdemocracyoh. Join us next time when we continue this conversation around growing democracy.