

# Abrea Armstrong Interview by Ian Davis-Huie

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Abrea Armstrong, Ian Davis-Huie

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- I** Ian Davis-Huie 00:03  
Hello, this is Ian Davis-Huie with the COVID-19 Oral History project. I'm here today interviewing Abrea Armstrong. I'm at home in Winston-Salem interviewing her today over Zoom. She's at home in Winston-Salem as well. How are you doing today, Ms. Armstrong?
- A** Abrea Armstrong 00:24  
I'm fantastic, Ian. How are you this morning?
- I** Ian Davis-Huie 00:27  
I'm doing pretty good myself, thanks a lot. And I also sent you a Consent form recently by email. Did you have chance to look over that?
- A** Abrea Armstrong 00:36  
Yes, I have reviewed it and I consent.
- I** Ian Davis-Huie 00:40

Fantastic. Thank you very much. Awesome. Well, I wanted to get started off asking a few questions about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it's impacted your life, so I guess I'll just ask that: how has the pandemic impacted your life these last few months?

A

Abrea Armstrong 00:59

Um, well, above all else, it's actually been quite a blessing. I've been able to start an entire business during this period, as well as prioritize and consider my non-negotiables in terms of a professional environment and what I want for myself in my career.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 01:21

Fantastic. So how, how have you adapted to the, the new lifestyle that we've all been forced into?

A

Abrea Armstrong 01:30

Yeah, so, to me, life is all about time management, so even before the pandemic started, (and I'm really appreciative for the Wake Forest School of Business for teaching me these skills), it's just the idea that there's so many hours in the day and you have to be diligent about maximizing the potential of each of them, or at least choosing when you choose not to maximize that potential and being deliberate about that as well because rest is also important. So for me, it was just really a matter of just looking at my workload from my full time job at the Innovation Quarter and looking at my freelance opportunities, as well as the activism that I've been taking part in and just scheduling it all out and building it all in so that it gets all done.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 02:21

Fantastic. So, when, when life goes back to normal here in hopefully a few months, or maybe a year or so, do you think there are any, maybe time management lessons you've learned that you'll carry on into the future?

A

Abrea Armstrong 02:41

Um, I'd probably say that prior to the pandemic, I wasn't very much of a morning person and I'm still, I still would not call myself that, but I have definitely learned to get up and go in the mornings in a way that I did it when I was going to the office. So it's also about understanding that there are hours forward and taking advantage of those as well.

I Ian Davis-Huie 03:05  
Yeah, I agree. You mentioned you work in the Innovation Quarter. You're the Marketing and Communications Manager, is that correct?

A Abrea Armstrong 03:15  
That's correct.

I Ian Davis-Huie 03:16  
Awesome. Would you tell me a little bit about what that job entails and what kind of work you do at the Innovation Quarter?

A Abrea Armstrong 03:25  
Yeah, so the Innovation Quarter is a community of makers, doers, thinkers, and just community members who come out to, whether it's play, live, learn or work, and it's, our main tenants are, (just to give you a few because there are literally hundreds), just give you a few are like the Wake Forest School of Medicine as well as Inmar, Forsyth Tech Small Business Center, Wake Forest PA program, (which I guess is through School of Medicine), so we've got, as well as what is now Agile City and the ACCESS Center, so we've got just this incredible collection of, of businesses and organizations who have come together to take part in this place that is meant to be an economic driver for the city as well as a driver for community convergence. And so what my team does is just illuminate those stories of those people on those community members and organizations that I just mentioned in order to create a community brand, that, especially whether it's people in, outside of downtown Winston-Salem, or even people outside of Winston-Salem, or even people outside of North Carolina, can then attach to and buy into and come and join our community. So it's everything from social media posts to billboards to poster copies to storytelling, it's, it's the full suite.

I Ian Davis-Huie 04:55  
It certainly has a lot, it's a far-reaching role, it sounds like. So, how has the pandemic impacted your ability to fulfill that role and all of your responsibilities?

A Abrea Armstrong 05:08  
Yeah, so, I mean, well, I'll say that our storytelling engine did kind of come to a bit of a, (I'm

not gonna say a halt), it just slowed down, you know, because some of the things that we were going to talk about just weren't a thing anymore, and they weren't, they weren't, it would, it would seem insensitive to put out certain pieces of content right now, and I appreciate my team for being mindful about that. So we just really had to shift gears and think about, "okay, well, what is happening within our community? What stories can we tell?" So, one story that comes to mind is a local developer named Coleman Team works with Front Street Capital teamed up with one of our restauranteurs who owns Alma Mexican, Claire Calvin, to raise money from the community to give to the restaurant and as well as a network of restaurants in order to prepare meals for our vulnerable populations, (most specifically, our homeless, but they also like, brought meals to hospitals, frontline workers). And so I just did it via phone, you know, instead of like, in person, and I just, you know, I just called Calvin, (err, excuse me), I called Claire, I called Coleman and just got those stories and just had to have them send me photos versus like a photographer going out and that we would hire as a team and doing those photos. I just kind of had to count on our library of assets, which I appreciate for already being really strong, it already had really great photos of both of them. And this is why preparation, this, (if any, if we've learned anything, preparation, like, if you come out of quarantine unprepared and without a plan like, you, you're really selling yourself short), so it was really just a matter of switching gears and thinking about "what stories can we tell?" And also doing our best about opening up, (I think this is the biggest thing), we opened ourselves up to the community. So on our owned properties, meaning our website, our social media, we, as well as our emails, we were only previously highlighting Innovation Quarter tenets, like, naturally, right? But with the pandemic, we're like, "you know what? We actually need to support all of our community at large." And so we opened up things like our calendar to community partners as well. So even people who were outside Innovation Quarter could reach our audience because we just, you know, we're in this together, want to be a team player.



Ian Davis-Huie 07:41

That's, that's terrific to hear. You touched on this a little bit with the story you told but I wanted to ask how the pandemic has impacted the people, you think, the people of downtown Winston-Salem. And that could be like in terms of businesses...



Abrea Armstrong 08:05

Yeah.



Ian Davis-Huie 08:05

...or just individuals who would typically come down to Innovation Quarter.

A

Abrea Armstrong 08:09

Yeah, that's a really, that's a really, really profound question. Um, there are definitely several businesses who won't survive or who aren't surviving. Like, for example, unfortunately, Alma Mexicana, the place I just mentioned, they'll be closing on the 25th, I mean, like this weekend. And definitely, just because the way that they're dining, their dining room is quite cozy, we'll say and so with the governor's guidelines, they can't quite make the profit that they need to, considering how small their dining room is. So there are, you know, things like that, but I know that our property management has done their best to give things like rent concessions and so, again, we're, we're trying to work on this all together. I definitely see less people walking around downtown; I actually really like that so I'm not going to complain about that at all. I feel like I have a place to myself and I'm, I love it. But because of that, I actually think that it's facilitated some of the protests that have been happening. There are just naturally less cars on the street, so it's a lot easier to march on the street. I know that's probably something people don't think about but that's why when, whenever the whole thing was, "you're blocking traffic" came out, I was like, "what traffic, you guys? I live here! What traffic are you talking about? This traffic does not exist!" So, so it's, it's, it's definitely changed the mood down here, it's a lot more serene, but we still have food trucks coming out. It's a lot more quiet at night because, of course, the bars are closed. And that's something that, I think we as young people downtown, (it's mainly comprised of young people like you and me), so a lot of us are just like, inside but I think what has also forced us to do is to strengthen the ties that we do have, so like whether it's spending more time with neighbors that we wouldn't otherwise see, or even when I do happen to go to the office once every three weeks and I see someone there, that's someone I may not have spoken to otherwise, but I'll speak to, because I'm like, "hey, like, long time, no see", happy to just see another person. So I'll say we, there are things called strong ties, and there are things called weak ties. So I think that this has strengthened our weak ties, as well as strengthened our strong ties.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 10:35

That's a really interesting thought. I really like that. You mentioned the, you made the joke about the traffic; do you think there are other ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has kind of, strangely enough, kind of paved the way for this movement for racial justice?

A

Abrea Armstrong 10:55

Well, certainly in the fact that people who might otherwise be preoccupied with things like

work aren't doing that for good or bad, you know, it's a two-sided coin here, you know, good in the sense that it allows them the opportunity to participate in things that they may not have otherwise had time to, you know, but bad in the sense of the, sort of, you know, the economic impact of, of all of that on all sides, right? So I definitely would, would say there's that and it's also, I think, in the celebrities in particular have illuminated the fact that it's the great equalizer. You know, if you, I'm a Spanish Language/Literature grad, so like there's a, there's an old like Shakespearean-like-type-old Spanish piece that talks about death as the great equalizer. So to me that's like the, the concept of us all being the same has like, been very, uh, I've known that, that's a known fact for me, but for some people, are, they're just realizing, "oh, like, oh, we are all the same. We can all get sick, we could like, you know, we can all lose our jobs." And so what it's definitely illuminated is the fact that like, we are and that we're all humans and that we are literally all in this together. If, you know, what happens in the detention center affects the rest of the city, if there's an outbreak there, those corrections, correctional officers, they come home, they come out into the world. So I think we've all began to realize our, our connectivity as well.



Ian Davis-Huie 12:37

Yeah, that's fantastic. I hadn't even thought of it through that lens. But you, you mentioned you're a, studied Spanish Language and Literature at St. John's University, (and this kind of ties back to what you were talking about, about being all, all the same with everyone): um, what do you think the value is in, in learning another language and kind of learning to empathize with someone?



Abrea Armstrong 13:09

Yes, that's, that's a fantastic question. That's exactly why I actually got this degree, (well, that and because it was, I was really good at it, so it was like an easy A, like so, you know, little side note, like, one of my, my best friends she majored dual with a dual major in Organic Chemistry and Microbiology and she would complain about her labs and stuff and I'm like, "ain't nobody tell you to major in those two things! Like, that's on you, girl, you should have been smart, like Spanish!"). Um, so, so I love that "I had a natural facility for it", I guess is the adult way of saying it, right? Um, but, above all else, I began to understand, (or, okay, I'll, I'll back up a little bit and go to high school). In high school, I saw The Motorcycle Diaries. Have you seen Motorcycle Diaries? Che Guevara?



Ian Davis-Huie 14:00

I have not.

A Abrea Armstrong 14:01  
Or read the book?

I Ian Davis-Huie 14:02  
No, I haven't.

A Abrea Armstrong 14:03  
Okay. But, but it basically is about Che Guevara's experience in terms of understanding how people are equal. He rode a motorcycle around South America and the particular instance where, it was like his epiphany, his turning moment was when he, (actually, speaking of illnesses), he went to a leper island and he started to realize like, "oh man, like, we're, we are all like, again, all in this together". And that's what sort of, drove his sense of egalitarianism via communism was that, was literally the physical state of being because he was a, he was also a medical doctor. But anyway, so I read that in high school, and I was like, "oh, man, they're all" and I saw in the movie all of these people who were my color, and I'm like, "wow, like", and that's our learning there're all these Black people in Latin American countries. Again, following along Che Guevara, you get to Cuba, most of Cuba is Black. And so like, as a teenager, I'm like, "wow, this is really fascinating". And so what learning Spanish has allowed at least me to do, (and I'm sure allows others to do with their languages), is to build, is a bridge to a whole new world of people, but who have shared, but, you know, different lived experiences. So now I can go and I can talk to a young Black woman in Columbia or (INAUDIBLE), or even, (Lord, Lord, not South (INAUDIBLE), oh Lord, oh!) Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa, Equatorial Guinea and be able to learn about your life experiences and not be able, and not have things like a language barrier in place and this allowed me to listen to their music and learn about their stories and their trials and their "luchas", their struggles. Um, and allow, and it's definitely been a strong grounding for my activism in the movement here, because I'm constantly, especially given the population of our city and Ian, you being from Winston, I'm sure you understand full well, that we have a pretty healthy-size Latino population. So especially here, I think it's super important that the Black and brown struggle is united and that we come together. So I definitely lean into my connections, whether it's with the Hispanic League, or even abroad, like I was just mentioned, in terms of having a worldly perspective on what this looks like, I lean into that because I was saying like, "well, 'la luchas (INAUDIBLE SPANISH)", the struggle is the same.

I Ian Davis-Huie 16:44

That is, that's a really very good point and I really admire bilingual people, I really admire that. You were mentioning how the leprosy, kind of visiting lepers, kind of helped the young man in the book and movie kind of empathize and it sort of changed his values. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected or changed your values at all?

A

Abrea Armstrong 17:15

Yeah, you know, I'm not gonna say, I, I, I'll put it like this: I, I can't necessarily say that it's changed, that the pandemic in itself has changed my values, I think things that have happened within this time period most certainly have. I mean, certainly there's a, a, I'm a lot more diligent about things like washing my hands so like, hygiene like certain, yeah, so like, I think, I think we all are, we all should be, um, and even too personally like, I love my alone time before but like, I love it, but also really love and appreciate seeing my friends. Like, we give each other really good hugs, (don't tell the governor), we give each other really good hugs and stuff these days, you know, when we do see each other because it's just like, "hello, like, a person to touch! How are you?" Like, you know, because many of us are single and live alone so we are each other's family. So like I said, you know, those, those strong ties strengthen further. But you know, just in terms of what's happened during this period, and with where I live, right here at the corner of Fourth and Church Street, and seeing what I've seen out my window because I've been home as a result of the pandemic has really made me rethink my stance, particularly on things like police reform versus abolition, and that sort of thing. And that's something that I'm still very much processing. I think there are a lot of questions to still be answered so I, I, I'm still haven't quite put that, my thoughts on that together because they're still kind of in shambles right now. But that, that's something that I will say has definitely changed in terms of values over this period is the, (I'll say this) it's the level of engagement and level of investment of our public officials in our community.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 19:18

That's really interesting. I, I want to go back to, we were talking about St. John's University and you were studying...

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Abrea Armstrong 19:27

Go Johnnies!

I

Ian Davis-Huie 19:30

But I also wanted to, so that's in New York City, New York.

A Abrea Armstrong 19:37  
Queens. Yes.

I Ian Davis-Huie 19:38  
Yeah. So how is, how's the experience of living in Winston-Salem, downtown Winston-Salem different from living in...

A Abrea Armstrong 19:49  
(Laughs)

I Ian Davis-Huie 19:49  
...with regards to, that can be with regards to the city itself or with regards to issues of race or...

A Abrea Armstrong 19:55  
No, no, I, I laugh because there are there definitely a lot of similarities living in downtown Winston; if I lived in Kernersville, you know, it'd be different. But, you know, seeing things like homeless people, and, and, you know, in the South, you know, we call them "tweakers". You know, like, seeing stuff like that, like, you know, it's whatever like and honestly, nobody has ever bothered me. I don't know if it's just like, my energy but I always say like, New York has really trained me well on like, how to deal with people like, they come up and are like, trying to still, sell you stolen goods and like that so you know, so those things are similar. And then even with what I was mentioning about COVID, slowing down traffic, my senior year, I lived in Tribeca, which is a neighborhood in lower Manhattan and Tribeca there's, that's where like, Goldman Sachs and the World Trade Center is like, it's a financial center. So Monday through Friday, it's like super, super busy, but on Saturday and Sunday, like hardly anybody lives down there. It becomes like, very, very like, residential, like, people with strollers and that sort of thing. And it's interesting because I've definitely said sometimes, a few times that like COVID Winston, downtown Winston reminds me of weekend Tribeca in that it's just like a lot, it's like, a lot more serene. Like, even if I went outside right now, like, I feel like it would be like, a lot more peaceful and quiet, more quiet than it would typically be, you know, on a, (what is this?), Thursday morning. So that's, that is the same. Having people like, looking at people through my window is very much the same. Police sirens is the same. I live a mile or a block away from the train tracks so hearing in the train, that's the same. So I actually think

that people will be kind of surprised at like actually how similar they are. The, the only difference is, I mean, probably the level of traffic and food options and what time the restaurants close.

I Ian Davis-Huie 22:01

Yeah, goes back to what you're saying about, you know, us all being the same. That's an interesting idea. So switching gears a little bit, obviously, the, the, kind of the crux of the team I work on is studying the overlap between the COVID-19 pandemic and issues of racial justice and the movement for racial justice now. So how do you, how would you say you reconcile public health concerns with obviously the validity and urgency that protesting kind of requires right now?

A Abrea Armstrong 22:42

Um, so meaning: how am I reconciling the idea that people need to physically be together in order to protest though...

I Ian Davis-Huie 22:50

Yes.

A Abrea Armstrong 22:50

...you shouldn't be? Right, that. Um, well, I mean, you can definitely think about it as the lesser of two evils. You could also think about in the sense of they are doing their best to adhere to protocols, meaning everybody's wearing a mask, um, spacing themselves apart, even when people do hold the microphone they like, sanitize the microphone between speakers, and the fact that they are outside, too, I think is, is, is an important thing here. I think, above all else, too what illuminates this is the fact, is that it's like, justice now, like, justice cannot wait. Like, like, these things cannot wait for the world to figure itself out. Like, there's always going to be other stuff going on. Like, the, what's the most important, as I say the lesser two evils, what's most important is addressing these things now, while things are malleable. And that's actually the beauty of this protest is like, everybody was realizing that the way that things work, didn't have to be going to the office every day, didn't have to be having a meeting about everything, didn't have to be. And so this idea of malleability and all the cultures changing and shifting was already happening and so this movement is really just leveraged that momentum.



Ian Davis-Huie 23:32

Great! I, I know you don't have an, an official title kind of within the local part of the Black Lives Matter movement, but you are, I would say, fairly involved. So what, what do you feel you bring to the movement or...



Abrea Armstrong 24:17

Um...



Ian Davis-Huie 24:22

...the work that needs to happen?



Abrea Armstrong 24:37

...yeah, so what I do my best to do is bring information to them that might not otherwise flow. So I said it works both ways, so if I hear the street demanding something, I'll do my best to take it to the mayor, chair, or city council person or, you know, whoever the appropriate entity might be in the same way of like, you know, if I know [Winston-Salem City Councilmember] James Taylor is about to put a proposal on the table that's relevant to us and he tells me this before it like, comes "out" out, I make sure to tell the team so that we can be planning about how we want to engage and support him, however we can. So being that point of convergence and I guess it's the whole communication thing, right, of, of just how, how do I connect these groups of people who are, you know, one is up here and like, one is down here like, literally, physically, right, like, one is on the street, and one is on the upper floors watching, so what is the middle ground? I do my best to be that, that point, but then also just because I'm, I'm aware also on the business side or standpoint, when they want to get involved and because again, people are being more mindful and diligent about "hey, how do we support our communities? How do we support Black and brown marginalized people in life", which is great. And so working with companies to say, "hey, here are local organizations that align with what you do that align with your values and here is a way for you to uniquely support them". So, for example, like, a company Shift, which is a videography company here, whose own, which is owned and founded by a, a lone white woman, (and you'll see why that's important in a second). And so her name is Sarah Lupton. So Sarah came to me like, "what should I do?" So, like, I helped her create a social media campaign, but within that, also built into sort of activations well, three, one is a push for diversity hires out of diverse hires weather, and then the other was to get her involved with Authoring Action, which is a local, they have a summer filmmaking camp, which is actually happening right now and they basically groom the next generation of

Black and brown filmmakers. So again, perfectly aligning. And the other was to support HUSTLE Winston-Salem and their solopreneur grants, which again, this company was founded by a solopreneur and HUSTLE supports underrepresented people. So again, to synergy, so again, how, how do we, how do I connect people? And so that, that's what I try to do my best to and also like, push people and have tough conversations, and I'm not afraid to put myself, myself out there. So I'm also going to do that when other people aren't.



Ian Davis-Huie 24:40

Is there a particular tough conversation that sticks out to you over the past few months?



Abrea Armstrong 27:36

Oh, my gosh, there's so many, like, especially last month; June was really tough about this. So like, at work, you know, all of a sudden, they want to have an urgent meeting about what to do about this. And I was like, and one, and one of them said, "I, I really want to be, I really want us to be authentic about this. Not jump on the bandwagon." I said, "Timeout, timeout, timeout: if we were being authentic, we would have done this six months ago." I'm like, "so let's not get on our high horse here and act like we're doing something novel when we should have been doing this." And I'm like, "and why are we just having this conversation?" I'm like, "why haven't we done anything?" I brought these things up before, like, "why aren't we doing this," and like, they were, they were quiet, (I'll put it like that, Ian they were very quiet). So that's the kind of work conversations I've been having. But then, you know, the, the sheriff and I are, as of late, we're always, always getting into it and particularly, I guess, the, God, they're, they're all so, all such lively discussions. But I'll give you one that materialized into something healthy. So we, we got into a healthy discussion on Juneteenth, (actually, I actually have on my Juneteenth shirt, too so, Juneteenth) but um, about COVID testing and of the residents' detention center. And I just let him know, I texted him to say that I was very displeased, and that I wasn't the only one who was not, who was pleased that they weren't testing all the residents, considering that COs have tested positive. And logically speaking, it only makes sense that some of the population is also positive as well. And, and I was like, "I'm not the only one, so just know like, there's going to be a protest. They're coming to your place tonight. So just, just a heads-up, right?" And so he calls me, and he's like, "what are you talking about?" And I'm like, "yeah, I'm like, you know what I'm talking about, you know, what your testing policy is, like, don't, don't act like you don't know what we're talking about here!" And so we really got into it about and he said, "oh, well, you know, that's not necessarily my decision, that's the healthcare providers and the guy like," this whole sort of thing. So that was on Friday, Juneteenth.

Tuesday, I, I text him to say like, "hey, just so you know, there's about to be another rally because they're not letting up on this, like, this is the thing." And that was that following Tuesday and so his response was, "they're late, we already did that." And I said, "well, when did you do this? Like, I just talked to you on Friday, um, and today's Tuesday, like, when did this happen?" He was like, he's like, "the press release, it'll be out on Thursday." And I'm like, "all right," and it actually came out Wednesday and somehow magically, right, somehow, magically, um, you know, he got with the healthcare, the President, or the CEO of their health care providers, the private contractor of their health care provider and the county commissioners, and suddenly, there's COVID testing for all the population. So sometimes you got to get up in somebody's a\*\* and just go for it because it's like, you know, like, what do you have to lose? Like, I'll be okay, but they might not.



Ian Davis-Huie 31:00

That is an amazing story. That, that is seriously really cool. So would you say this has changed, (that's kind of a time where your values kind of helped, kind of created change), is there a, is there a time where you think your values have been changed because of this movement or anything you've changed your opinion on?



Abrea Armstrong 31:27

Yeah. Oh, for sure. So that's what I was mentioning about the police reform thing. So, also out of that conversation, the sheriff said, "hey, let's set up a meeting. Come by, let's talk about this. Let's figure this out." And so, ahh, me, and I brought three people, community stakeholders, with me, had a meeting with him, the captain, Captain Slater, who was literally like, the, the head of like, the detention center, Brian Sack, as well as the business manager, so the money guy. So it was the three of them on one side of the table and the four of us on the other and we just talked about areas that we can like, work together and I'm having another meeting with the sheriff next Wednesday to finalize those, that talk. And so I really was like, "we can work on this system as is. Like, we can, we can find places for our (INAUDIBLE) in this system." But then, they started policing peaceful protest and out my window, it's like, 11 p.m., I'm trying to go to bed, and just all of these blue and red lights and I'm just like, and it's just, it's, first it was like, three squad cars and then suddenly, it was 20 squad cars and then suddenly, people are getting arrested and I'm just like, "who, I didn't vote for this! Like, my tax dollars. I don't, I don't, excuse me. I don't support this." And that really, really made me angry and watching that happen night after night. I'm like, "you know what? Like, actually, I, I might be on team abolition like, after this, and, and that's something I'm really trying to reconcile and that's something that I'm definitely going to bring up to the sheriff when I see him, (we have our one-on-one next week). Because this, I, I, that's something I just, I don't see, I don't see the sense in. And it, it really

has put a very, very sour taste in my mouth about the Winston-Salem Police Department in particular.

I Ian Davis-Huie 33:26  
Just to be completely sure here: when you say "team abolition", you mean abolishing the police, correct?

A Abrea Armstrong 33:32  
Yes, yes, correct.

I Ian Davis-Huie 33:33  
Fantastic. Could you talk a little bit more about that? Just, just, like, like, I, I know a lot about, defunding the police has become kind of a common sort of buzzword or "buzz-term" at this time...

A Abrea Armstrong 33:50  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

I Ian Davis-Huie 33:50  
...what's, how is it different from abolishing the police?

A Abrea Armstrong 33:53  
Yeah, and, and, actually, we're, we're putting together a video series, meaning like, we already shot them and I already like, looked at the first look of this very episode where I break down those terms. So, essentially, defund is the first step in abolition. So it's, so it's taking away or reallocating resources that were previously given to police departments for other community welfare items, whether it be things like Parks and Recreation or social services and that sort of thing. So it's really just a matter of refunding the community. And, like I said, and defund it's just like, it's, a it's, it's kind of like, that's how abolition kind of happens, in a way, is, is incrementally through incrementally defunding the, your respective policing department. And so I, because I'm just realizing like, I'm like, I'm like, "these people don't need, (I'll, I'll, I'll put like this) I've just realized I don't want them to have my money. Like, I, I want my money to go to other things." And that's what defunding/abolition stands for. And abolition really just means to, the total dismantle. But

what I think is really important is the abolitionists aren't advocating for these systems to be advocated tomorrow, tomorrow. So meaning like, don't close the jail tomorrow, that's not what they're wanting. It's, again, it's that incremental, sort of, defund process of doing things like, "okay", and something that James Perry, (Ian, I would encourage to talk to him as well, CEO of the Urban League), something that James Perry like, often mentions is like, traffic infractions or even like, you know, marijuana offenses: how, how are we policing or how, at what level are we criminalizing, (there we go), at what level are we criminalizing those offenses and if they, if we, or if currently, they are jailable offenses, (because like, right now, if, if you have a broken taillight and you can't pay your fines or you're, you're caught with an ounce of weed or, you know, something like that, something that is not necessarily harming the general like, like, no one is really, truly being like, deeply endangered, um, you know, non violent offenses, right now, those, you could be put in jail for those things and we need to reevaluate even how we police and criminalize those things). So that's an example of how you slowly dismantle a system is by kind of reevaluating how things are working and readjusting them and then, before you know it, your caterpillar will have metamorphed [sic] into a butterfly.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 36:37

That's really interesting. I, I, I don't expect you to have all of the answers in the world to every problem, but I, I did want to ask: so, if, if the, if the police is abolished, let's say, do you, do you have an idea of what kind of thing would take its place? Is there anything that would take its place?

A

Abrea Armstrong 37:01

Yeah, I mean, I have my personal theories. I am not a criminal justice expert or sociology expert to talk about how people think and how societies operate, so full disclaimer there. However, I do have two years of Political Science under my belt, as well as 28 years as a woman of color, so put that out there. Um, so my thinking is, (and I say this too because I am a very much, all for my Second Amendment rights and the idea of people protecting themselves, so I do, I think there's a lot of value in that and particularly value in communities policing and protecting themselves. For a long time, particularly before, pre-integration, Black communities, for many reasons that I think we all can logically understand, did not trust policing authorities. It did not represent them, those people and it's like, "why", because those people were not from there, those people did not understand their values, those officers did not understand who was who. But who does is, is the people within the neighborhood, so I think that it's really important that we empower people to police themselves and to hold themselves to a certain standard, because right now it's like, (and they're literally dealing with this with all the recent murders that have been

going on, unfortunately), it's the idea that even if community members currently see something, they're not very likely to say something because that trust has not been established. But they know amongst themselves and they'll talk amongst themselves because they trust each other, but they don't trust the outside entity. So it's like, you need to have the community involved and get community buy-in and understand who the leaders are, and empower those community elected leaders to, to have more of a presence and like, "how do we create a, a like, for like, a Muslim community police force where there are like, liaisons or representatives for each of what are now currently the, what we call precincts, you know, within our city, like within each ward? How do we, because, because those structures are already made, how do we like, look at those precincts even and, and see who are the community-elected, (not like politically-elected), the community, street-elected leaders, and how do we empower them to keep their community safe?", and, and that sort of thing. So like, those are my thoughts. I'll put it like this: if the, if the police were abolished today, I'll be fine, Ian. Ain't nobody coming in here. And so I just want everybody else to feel that way about themselves as well.



Ian Davis-Huie 38:01

That's great. Glad, I'm glad I got your thoughts on that. I, so I, I want to kind of go back to something talking about a little bit earlier on. Obviously the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and many others were highly publicized, I think it was that last week in May that it was...



Abrea Armstrong 40:28

Mm-hmm. Yeah, Memorial Day-ish. Mm-hmm.



Ian Davis-Huie 40:30

Yeah, that things really kind of..



Abrea Armstrong 40:34

Erupted.



Ian Davis-Huie 40:35

Yes, the spark, yeah, "erupted" is a great word.

A Abrea Armstrong 40:37  
Mm-hmm.

I Ian Davis-Huie 40:38  
So, why, why do you think their deaths, among other factors, started this recent wave of protest?

A Abrea Armstrong 40:49  
I think it's probably a lot of the fact that people weren't busy with their lives. The news cycle was at a state where there was room for content. Um, I do question often what stories get chosen because these are not unique tales. And so just from like, media and communications like, you know, like, a mass-com standpoint, I sometimes, I definitely do wonder, "why these stories?" I definitely see like, even like, Breonna Taylor because she, that happened in February, you know what I mean? Like, so, and I, and that's, I totally get it because like, she, this, that's a plain-cut case. You know, Breonna was asleep, right? You know, so, I, you know, I get that but sometimes like, sometimes I do wonder like, why certain stories get picked up and why certain stories get elevated. And so in this particular case, I'm going to say part of it was the news cycle and I think the fact that everyone, even before this idea of togetherness, right, even before Memorial Day weekend, everybody was like, "Alone Together" or "Winston Strong", this idea of community and being equals, and again, being together was a value that was like pushed. So when you see things happening in the community and you've got this whole togetherness mindset in there, like, already sort of top of mind, it's, it's only natural then for the community to want to act upon that sense of sort of obligation to protect one of its own, its own. And that's why I really appreciate that our movement is very much focused on, especially as of late, shifted to a focus on like, our local issues and what is happening like, directly within our community and so that we can be together specifically. I hope that answered your question.

I Ian Davis-Huie 43:00  
It definitely does. It's, "Black Lives Matter" as just a slogan has really grown a lot, in a lot of popularity over the past few years, and obviously, especially over the last few months, but there are still a significant number of people who would say, "all lives matter". So what would you say to the people that prefer the phrase "all lives matter" to "Black Lives Matter"?

A

Abrea Armstrong 43:28

Well, Ian, let me tell you something: I really pride myself on being a woman of elegance and carrying that mystique and taking it with me very seriously. So when I think of those people and hear about those sorts of things, it really takes me out of that sense of elegance and really makes me just want to slap a m\*\*\*\*f\*\*\*\*. So I don't have much of a direct rebuttal to that because I don't deal with ignorance, I'm above and beyond that. So I will let good white people like you, who have the patience for those sorts of things, deal with that, because that, that's not my job, that's not my burden. And even before all of this, like, like so, for example, Silver Moon is my most beloved bar, I pray it will open soon. And Silver Moon, if you ask me, is the most diverse bar in Winston-Salem, and so anybody except Wake frat boys, (thank God), comes there. And, and, and so you never know. And so I was just like, talking to this guy, you know, young white man one day or one evening, I should say, and he said something and I, and I, I, I don't recall what it was, but it just triggered something in me. And I said to him, I said, "did you vote for Donald Trump", and he said, "why do you ask", and I was like, "that means yes. That's all I needed to know." And I literally said to him, I said, "you don't deserve my conversation". So this is something that I've, I've, I've been standing on this "I don't deal with ignorance", um, high horse for a while and what my rebuttal to that is that all Black lives matter because I think it's really important, too that we make sure that we include our, you know, our trans and our queer community and them, so, so lately I've, I've really been pushing the idea of not just "Black Lives Matter", but all Black lives matter.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 45:36

I like that a lot. Switching gears a little bit, you recently became the President of the Young Professionals in Winston-Salem, right?

A

Abrea Armstrong 45:50

That's correct.

I

Ian Davis-Huie 45:50

That's a branch of the local Urban League. First of all, I want to say congratulations.

A

Abrea Armstrong 45:58

Oh, thank you.



Ian Davis-Huie 45:59

Anytime. How do you see the, the work and agenda of the Black Lives Matter movement or just your own, what you want to see in terms of progress in racial justice affecting what you do with Young Professionals moving forward?



Abrea Armstrong 46:18

Um, it's definitely made me like, want to like, switch gears. I think if, if these things weren't happening, I might be focused on things like how do we do things like reach back to Africa and sort of grounding ourselves deeper in our identity, (and that might be something I still do), but I think what's really important now is that we ground ourselves in our community, our local community. So, (and this is all, at this point, just vision, Ian. Let's just pray I'm speaking truth to power here), is well, you know, what I really want to do is just hold, help the members, my fellow Young Professionals hold their companies accountable for the diversity inclusion efforts that they might be doing and if they're not doing them, how, you know, helping them create a framework to push their respective organizations to get involved in these sorts of efforts. There's a history of professionals in Winston-Salem in particular playing a role in activism and so I think it's important that we, as young Black professionals who are often what we call the only's, (you know, the only ones in the office, the only ones at the meeting, the only ones on the Zoom), when we're the only's I think it is important for us to all get on the same page. And as we go out into our disparate places, making sure that we're, we're still representing and keeping in mind those of us who didn't make it this far, who didn't make it to corporate benefits and in a good nine-to-five.



Ian Davis-Huie 47:54

Great point. I have one last question I want to ask you: (I'm gonna leave this intentionally vague) what do you see as progress moving forward in the coming months and years?



Abrea Armstrong 48:06

That's, that's really funny you asked that because one day I was getting, (this would have been in June, of course, probably, it was a tough month, I'm telling you, a tough month), I was talking to one of my friends named Allen Thomas, he ran for Lieutenant Governor, and I was just telling him how frustrated I was with how much work needed to be done. I'm like, "Allen, there is just so much to do, like, how do you deal with this?" And actually, I saw (INAUDIBLE) last night, we were talking about this, too, the idea of how much work needs to be done, but that is possible. And what Allen said to me, he was like, "well, just remember that progress is the goal." So, I also, I also think that it's important that we

acknowledge that, I think often like, we want, instead of the goal being just like, abolition, like, you know what I'm saying, instead of it being like, a sort of clear cut and dry I think that, yeah, now I understand what progress is, but just in general in terms of context, I think that we, it's important that we acknowledge that progress itself is the goal. So what, what looks like, what's progress for me are things like what I'm seeing where the correctional officers are being charged with manslaughter, like, fast progress. Things like, in theory, things like a Black sheriff being elected is progress, things like more, (and I, I lean more in the political route as well as the business route), things like more people of color being in leadership roles both in business as well as in civics is progress. Getting our city council meetings translated into Spanish, in terms of closed caption, is progress. Getting a person under the age of 40 on the school board is progress, right? So it's like, um, so, so, like I said, as I say, those are the goals, so we need to be thinking about those as goals, okay? How, (and I, I use this as an example because a young man did run and the community didn't embrace him and I think that it would be different), but I really wish the primaries were now, like, I really wish the primaries hadn't been in January, or I mean, in March, like, at the beginning of the year. Um, like, I really wish they would have been now because they would have gotten so differently. People are so much more involved and aware of who their politicians are and who is representing them. I think, yeah, I know that the primaries would have gone very, very differently in this climate. So we need to be thinking about this for our next election cycle is like, "how do we, you know, who can we as a group of young people select as a millennial to put on the school board? How do we push and support this person? How do we ensure that the, that the DA follows through with these manslaughter charges, you know? How do we continue to make sure that the detention center is testing their population regularly, you know", so, (and, and that's something that I, I literally think I'm going to be talking about with the sheriff next week), so like, to me, like, that, that's progress. So even just having these conversations and creating very clear action steps is progress. And I really want, soon this local community to start writing more bills and lobbying; I keep telling people, I'm like, "yo, that's what big pharma does. That's what every other like, you know, PAC does, Super PAC does." I was like, "why would we not do the same? Just, we just need to write the proposal, just write the bill and then just get somebody to stand behind it, whether it's at the state or, you know, city-level or county-level, like, it's, it's really like, it's not that difficult," and that's what I was saying last night: it can be done. And that's what I love about this city is that change can be done here. So I'm actually super excited to see what Wake does themselves and, because I am personally holding President Hatch accountable, and, and the Business School accountable and literally, when I got Wake Forest's, newest issue of Wake Forest's magazine and I opened up, I was just flipping through and this issue is called the Writer, Writers Hall of, Writers Hall of Fame and it was literally all white men. Literally every single one was a white man and I'm like, "Really? There are no Wake Forest women or people of color alums who are good writers? Is that really what you're telling

me?" And I sent an email to the Alumni Engagement woman, Stacy Owen, at the business school and I was like, "Stacy, this is, this is what I'm talking about. Like, this is what I mean. Like, who made this decision? Like, we need to do better." And so I'll be also really curious to see like, how, how Wake reconciles this, but progress is even getting one person of color in the Writers Hall of Fame, you know? So like, it's, it's, it's the goal and it's progress at the same time.



Ian Davis-Huie 53:13

Well, I think that was a, a great answer and I think that's a great place to just stop this interview for today. I want to thank you so much for sharing your voice with us and talking to me today, really means a lot. Thank you very much.



Abrea Armstrong 53:29

Absolutely, Ian.