

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Alicia Garza

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by the activist, organizer, writer, and someone I'm honored to call a very dear friend: Alicia Garza, where I ask her: Why Are Domestic Workers' Rights Essential? Welcome to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. I am so excited to welcome our friend back, which I'm going to do, like, your official intro, because it's gorgeous, like in a minute, 'cause I just want to, wait. It's Alicia Garza! Well, actually now I'm going to do it because it's too good to not do it right now. You're the principal at the Black Futures Lab. You are the Strategy and Partnerships Director at the National Domestic Workers Alliance. You are also the co-creator of the Black Lives Matter Global Network. You also host a podcast called "Lady Don't Take No." And you co-host the podcast "Sunstorm." And your new book, "The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart," comes out this month. And can I just say, can I get an advance copy? Can I get?

ALICIA GARZA [00:01:01] Of course!

JVN [00:01:02] If it comes out on the, because I, it comes out on the 20th, right?

ALICIA GARZA [00:01:04] Yeah. It's on its way to you.

JVN [00:01:06] Yeah. And I don't want everyone to be jealous, because I do think this might come out next week. So, like, this, probably, it will be, like, before it comes out, so I don't want y'all to be jealous. So I do. I want to read it so bad. I'm so proud of you and excited. And I just, I know, just based on your work and having gotten to spend the time with you, I've spent so far. This book is gonna be so important. And I have chills on my triceps, and I haven't even gotten to read it yet. So I'm just so excited that you're here. And I'm also really excited to talk to you about your work at the National Domestic Workers Alliance. And I think that so many folks interact with, you know, a domestic worker but don't even know what qualifies as that. Don't know how we can support those folks better. Those folks are also so commonly the folks who are most at harm and at risk by the current administration. So I'm really curious about all that.

ALICIA GARZA [00:01:58] Yeah.

JVN [00:01:58] Also, I'm really curious about how you are. And I love you so much. And-

ALICIA GARZA [00:02:01] I love you so much too.

JVN [00:02:02] But yeah. So, I mean, I guess, just kind of starting at the top. What constitutes a domestic worker?

ALICIA GARZA [00:02:09] Sure. Well, first of all, Jonathan, I'm so excited to see you. And, you know, I think it was a year ago now that we were together in, oh god, where were we?

JVN [00:02:20] Philly.

ALICIA GARZA [00:02:20] That's right. That's right. Philly. And there was a Netroots conference happening. And I just fell in love with you then. And I'm still in love with you now. So that's all I want to say about that. Number two, let's talk about domestic work and domestic workers. So we actually all know what and who domestic workers are. The challenge here is that this is a profession that is literally seen as, like, somebody who is just a part of the family. It's not actually always seen as a profession. Domestic work is work that happens inside of our homes. So cleaning work, taking care of kids, taking care of seniors and elderly people, providing independence and supporting independence for people with disabilities. That is all work that happens inside of the home. And I think what a lot of people don't realize is that that work is deeply undervalued, deeply underpaid, and completely unregulated.

So domestic work really has its roots in the legacy of slavery. And it used to be the work that Black women did in white people's homes. So, you know, lots of folks employed domestic workers, under slavery, it wasn't employment. Right? It was enslavement. So Black women, our roles were to help to reproduce the home. Was to make sure that the kids were getting fed. Lots of domestic workers at that time breastfed other people's babies. It was the work that was necessary to keep food on the table to maintain the household. And today the work is the same. And unfortunately, a lot of the conditions that originated under enslavement are still in this industry now.

So people don't, a lot of people don't know that domestic work is one of the only professions. Right? Domestic work and agricultural work that isn't covered by most federal labor protections. So that means so many domestic workers in this country don't have access to overtime, sick pay, sick days, and again, this has a lot to do with how this industry began. Now, you can imagine, Jonathan, that during a pandemic, domestic workers have become incredibly, incredibly important. And yet we're still fighting for the same kinds of basic rights and dignity and respect that is needed. But at this time, right? When everybody is being forced to stay home, in order to stay safe and stay healthy, domestic work is even more precarious than it was pre-pandemic.

And for some people who are employing domestic workers, they weren't even sure if they should keep employing the people who were working for them. So a lot of domestic workers got fired suddenly, just told not to come back or they were asked to work under incredibly unsafe conditions. Some of this had to do with the fact that the president of this country was offering zero guidance about how people can keep themselves safe. But he was also offering zero guidance about, you know, how to keep the people who keep our country running safe as well, and how to make sure that they can also take care of their families in a time that's so incredibly precarious.

So that's why what we do at the Domestic Workers Alliance is so important. We fight for rights and dignity for, for people who work inside of our homes. These are largely women of color, Black women, and immigrant women. And what we've done, honestly, Jonathan, is we've employed a strategy that really mirrors the strategy of the same-sex marriage movement. Where because, right, there work unequal and uneven laws all across the country. What they did was they actually started in states in order to build momentum for a federal bill. So to date, we've won a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in at least 10 states across this nation. And that has all culminated in the introduction of a Federal Domestic Worker Bill of Rights as of late last year.

So we've been fighting at the federal level to, for the first time ever ensure rights, dignity and respect for domestic workers all over this country. And literally, it would be the first time that people who are working inside of our homes have standards in terms of what you have to pay people, standards in terms of labor protections and all of those things. So that's a little bit about what we're up to. And You know, I said earlier that domestic work is rooted in the legacy of slavery, and it means that the conditions that surround this industry are deeply tied to how this country has or has not valued Black women. Well, today, the industry is much more diverse. There's white ladies that are doing domestic work. There's a lot of immigrant women and women of color who are doing this work. And Black women are also still doing this work.

But instead of predominately finding Black women as cleaners, right? Or as nannies, you're mostly finding Black women concentrated in the public health industry and in particular in the caregiver sector of this economy. So folks who are supporting people with illnesses, folks who are supporting people who are elderly. And again, same standards apply, which is that there aren't really consistent standards. So Black women have been leading the charge around this fight for a very long time. And we're certainly at the center today of what it means to address a massive public health crisis, but also address the deep inequities in our, in our society and in our economy that leave women, women of color, Black women and immigrant women behind. Yeah.

JVN [00:08:09] Well, not, yes, but I love how you're just able to disseminate, like, a lot of information in a really, like, just an incredibly direct and gorgeous, well, it's not gorgeous, but it's really informative. And I appreciate that.

ALICIA GARZA [00:08:21] Thank you.

JVN [00:08:22] So I have a lot of questions.

ALICIA GARZA [00:08:23] Excellent.

JVN [00:08:24] So, so what. So I was writing down like I have a really good friend who actually used to be one of my beauty school instructors who then stopped teaching beauty school and she got into the care industry and she works at like a home for like developmentally disabled adults who need extra support. And so they have, like, live-in care there and there's, like, you know, it's, like, probably like a six-bedroom house and there's like, you know, two bedrooms for people that, you know, give care there all the time. And then for the folks that, like, you know, are in, like, live there. Like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:08:49] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:49] They live there. so based on what state you live in, is that what I hear you saying, that, like, if you're, so not only if you're employed by, like a house, like, you know, if like, if, you know, you're going to a house, but also, like, even if you work, like this one place comes to mind for my hometown, Good Samaritan home, it's, like, where, it's like a, like, a old people home.

ALICIA GARZA [00:09:07] Yeah.

JVN [00:09:07] Like they, if the people there are, like, not getting paid overtime or if there's some, like, improper stuff happening, there is not, like, just some regulatory place that you get to go report that to?

ALICIA GARZA [00:09:18] No, not really. And so that the work we do.

JVN [00:09:20] What?

ALICIA GARZA [00:09:21] Right. So first and foremost, we have to just acknowledge that this work requires such heart and love. I mean, this is not just work that, like, anybody can do. Right? You have to really love people. You have to really know how to connect with

people. And you have to know how to build deep relationships with people who sometimes have a different way of communicating with you. Right? This is, like, intense work that people are doing and this is work that they choose to do. Right? Because they love their jobs. They love their work. They love the fact that they can be someone in someone else's life who that they, who they can depend on for care. And so imagine, right, that a person who would be sitting with your grandma so that she's not alone or somebody who would be sitting, you know, with a person with developmentally different, right, tendencies and, and abilities. Right? Would have somebody that they could relate to and who could support them being able to be independent.

Imagine that those folks don't actually have consistent or clear rules around how their industry is regulated or not. Imagine that those folks don't have clear rules around how much you can pay people, how many hours people need to work before they either have breaks or get to have a meal or get to go home and spend time with their own families. Like, imagine that the people who are caring for the folks that we care for the most don't have the things that they need to take care of themselves or their families. And yet every single day, what they do, even though they're not getting paid enough, even though they don't have benefits, even though they're not covered by most federal labor protections, that every single day they still go to work and still do the work that powers this entire country. So, yeah, it's unbelievable that we wouldn't be caring for people who are caring for the folks we love the most. But that's part of what's wrong and that's what we're fighting.

JVN [00:11:28] And I, it's such an important fight. It's, like, I think about hairdressing Board of Cosmetology. I think about, like, OSHA. I think about, like, a lot of different things that are meant to oversee. I think one scary thing that I ascertain from interviewing Erin Brockovich a few weeks ago is that, like, her new book is, like, "Superman's Not Coming." And essentially it's, like, a lot of the protective agencies that are kind of meant to be there to protect folks are actually end up getting run by people that, like, are trying to dismantle it or sweep stuff under the rug. Then I think about, like, wages and me being, like, someone who is, like, a business owner, like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:02] Yep.

JVN [00:12:02] I know other folks who are in my position who, like, maybe don't provide health insurance, like, to anyone so that they don't have to do it for anyone. Like, in my company, like, literally, like, we all have a platinum plan.

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:14] Yep, there you go.

JVN [00:12:14] Like, we're all doing benefits. We're all doing, like, one thing I do feel like candidly, I'm struggling with is, like, time off.

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:20] Yeah.

JVN [00:12:20] Like, if someone wants to work with me or something, like, I am kind of doing it. But at the same time, it's like when I feel, like, guilty for how much time we're working, like, we're doing bonuses, like we're, like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:30] That's great.

JVN [00:12:30] I think about it. And then, like, when I was self-employed doing hair, it's like I did the same thing. Like if I was on my way home at ten o'clock, but someone was like, "Can I get a partial highlight"? I'm talking at night. "Yes, I'll be right back."

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:41] Yes.

JVN [00:12:41] Because I wanted the money, like, I needed it. Like, I had shoes to buy, cats to feed, stuff to do.

ALICIA GARZA [00:12:46] Totally.

JVN [00:12:47] And so I kind of still feel like that now. And I do employ, like, you know. I employ, like, six people, like, at a full time rate, and we're doing insurance. It's like a thing, so, but I can't at the same time, like have like, we have a contract. Like, I agree. They agree. Like, it's the whole thing, whereas, like, I think about, like, a cleaning lady or someone who's coming in your house, like, there isn't the same.

So much of what's been in the way of why we don't have an agency like this, I'm just guessing.

ALICIA GARZA [00:13:13] Yep.

JVN [00:13:14] But a lot of the people who have help at home, whether it's a cleaning lady or whatever, or a nanny or a caregiver, if you're rich enough to have someone, like, care for a sick member of your family because of our broken health system or what, I just feel, like, a lot of those people end up being Republican and then a lot of those people, and I'm not saying that all Democrats do it too, because we learn from that one episode that Democrats can be super problematic too.

ALICIA GARZA [00:13:36] Yes. Yes. But.

JVN [00:13:37] But it's, like, a lot of times those same people. It's, like, the ethos of Republicanism is, like, "How can I keep my money the longest?" Like, how can I pay as least possible to like, because under this thing of like, well I did it myself and under Elizabeth Warren's whole thing, it's like we know that maybe you did do it a lot your own, but you also had a lot of help. And so without rules, it's kind of rigged. And so we, you know, so a lot of that help actually comes from the fact that there is someone supporting your wife or someone supporting your kids or someone doing something. And then a lot of times, like they're not getting overtime. How do we, if we have someone that helps us with our house, like, you know, once-a-week situation, how do we make sure they're OK? You know? Like, because even when they weren't coming through the pandemic, I'm, like, honey, we're paying you every week. Like, we got to, like, make sure that you're OK.

ALICIA GARZA [00:14:19] Yeah.

JVN [00:14:19] Because, like, Jesus. But I'm sure there's a lot of people that weren't fucking doing that.

ALICIA GARZA [00:14:23] That's right.

JVN [00:14:24] Then I just wrote down under the notes, like, "Republican women." So what do we do about them? Like what do you do? So I just, what are you up against? How can we all help better? How can we all be more authentic and culpable in our responsibility for how we're fucking up the system and maybe not doing as good as we need to be doing?

ALICIA GARZA [00:14:42] Yep. These are all great questions. So let me start with a couple of things. Number one, you mentioned Elizabeth Warren. And I swear to God, everyday I'm like, damn, we could have had a bad bitch. But OK, let's move on. Number two, all of those questions you just laid out are questions that people are asking themselves all the time. So from an employer's standpoint, from a worker's standpoint, and that's the whole issue, is that there's no, there's different rules for everybody, and that's not fair. And it has real impacts, some people's lives. And it's not just impacts on workers' lives, it's impacts on employers' lives as well. And there are a lot of us who never even saw ourselves as employers. Right? We're like, "No, I had somebody clean my house, but I'm not like an employer." I also run an organization, I employ 10 people. I pay people at the top of the salary scale. People have platinum benefits. People get time off and then they get extra time off.

And then during the pandemic, I was like, every Friday is a Flex Day because, shit, I have single mothers on my team. I have mothers on my team, I have queer people on my team. Like people need space and time to like deal with themselves so that they can show up and actually do the job that they love to do and they don't love to do their job if when they go to their job, their job doesn't even think about, "Hey, are you actually OK? 'Cause I know you're not a robot." Right? So there's all of that stuff. And I think the main thing that we're trying to intervene on right now across party. Right? Because honestly, it's everybody. I mean, I have met liberal Democrats that don't pay their workers. And I'm, like, this is really terrible that you don't pay your workers, but it's because they don't see folks as workers. They're like, "Oh, this is just something you do." And that's the thing that I think is the vestige of enslavement.

JVN [00:16:27] What does that though?

ALICIA GARZA [00:16:28] But that's the thing that's the vestige of enslavement, right? Because Black women that were doing that work, people weren't looking at us, like, "Oh, you're somebody who I employ and I pay you." They were like, "this is just what you're supposed to do." Get me? Get me?

JVN [00:16:45] But what? But, but what liberal Democrats are literally not paying the people that are help? Like do you mean, like?

ALICIA GARZA [00:16:50] Oh, you'd be surprised. You'd be surprised. I can't spill all this tea on this show. But let me just tell you.

JVN [00:16:56] We can edit it out later.

ALICIA GARZA [00:16:57] I can't, I can't, I can't. But here's the main point. Here's the main point. There is something that you can do. There's a ton of things. And that's what we do with the Domestic Workers Alliance. So, number one, it's important that those of us who bring people into our homes to do work that we would otherwise be doing. But we can't do because we have other things to do. It's important to see those people as workers and as people who have their own families and they are trying to support themselves. That is why you exchange a wage for work. Right? So number one, pay your workers. Number two, we developed this thing at the Domestic Workers Alliance through our Fair Care Labs called Alia.org. And Alia is basically a platform that if you are somebody who has a cleaner come to your home, who employs a nanny, this is a platform that you can pay into to make sure that your, the person that works with you in your home has access to benefits, has access to sick time off. Right? And they have a little account that you can pay into. It could be 25 dollars a month so that they actually bank up time. So because there's not all these

rules, right, on the federal level, you can actually start to employ some of these rules in your own home. And we make it really easy for you to do that. Also.

JVN [00:18:12] Oh my god, I love that. Wait. I gotta, that's, that's genius. So basically, if you have someone, because a lot, so there's a difference between like a W-2 and then like a 1099.

ALICIA GARZA [00:18:22] Yep.

JVN [00:18:22] Like, a person who is, like, you know, a full-time employee, then someone who might come, like, once or twice a week or whatever.

ALICIA GARZA [00:18:26] That's right.

JVN [00:18:27] So if you have that person who is, like, a once or twice a week queen or, like, someone who, like, runs an errand for you sometimes and you're like, Oh, my God, are you okay? Do you have insurance and stuff?" Like, what the fuck?

ALICIA GARZA [00:18:35] Yep.

JVN [00:18:36] You can get them on Alia and then you can put it in yourself? Like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:18:40] That's right. That's right. And the cool thing is, right, that it's portable. So they can take that platform everywhere that they work. So say the person works at my home. And then they work at your home. You and I can both pay into this. Right? And so then if they're like, "Actually, I need to take a sick day off," you're like, "You know what? Go ahead and do that. What do you have in your account?" Right? So then they can draw from that account and not lose wages because their kid's at home sick or maybe they got strep throat or God forbid, maybe they got the 'rona.

JVN [00:19:13] Because I don't want you to come over if you have the 'rona anyway.

ALICIA GARZA [00:19:17] No, you sure don't. But these are the choices that workers are forced to make. They're forced, right, because they can't continue to pay the bills if they don't work, they're forced to go to work sick. And you don't want that. And I don't want that. And this is the whole problem with people having different rules for everybody is that there is no consistent way that we can make sure that we're all safe and we're all good. So that's why we started to innovate on this. And we developed Alia.org to help. Even the government, think about, this is what you need to be doing. But in the meantime, because

we're not going to wait for you to do it, we're going to do it. And we have a model that used to be scaling nationwide.

JVN [00:19:51] OK. I can't wait to hear more about this. We're gonna take a really quick break and we'll be right back with more Alicia Garza after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. So. OK. I love the innovation. I love this. So is it spelled like Aliyah, Aliyah. Like everyone's favorite Aliyah? Like A-l-i-y.

ALICIA GARZA [00:20:07] No, it's not A-l-i-y-a-h. But it is A-l-i-a.org.

JVN [00:20:15] Love.

ALICIA GARZA [00:20:15] Super simple.

JVN [00:20:17] Ok, love that. We're getting in there, I'm writing it down just because that's really genius and so amazing. So one thing that I was also curious about. So, like, I have one friend who is, like, the friend of a friend. And that's how I found my domestic worker in New York who we're obsessed with, we love. she does it better than I could ever do it myself. Which that's, like, hard to find someone who, like, actually, and also loves the cats and, like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:20:41] Yeah.

JVN [00:20:41] Just you know, cares. And she's, like, just amazing. I'm obsessed with her. So then when I moved to Texas, I was, like, I didn't know how to, like, I don't have any, I didn't have any friends here, I didn't know anybody. Whereas, like, I knew everyone in New York.

ALICIA GARZA [00:20:52] Yeah.

JVN [00:20:52] So then like, I used, like, an agency for a week or two. And then I just, I just got this feeling. I was, like, this is not a good feeling. And also, I could just, like, tell they were kind of, like, sad and, like, they weren't, like, and I have, like, four really cute cats. Like, my cats are, like, above average cuteness.

ALICIA GARZA [00:21:11] Yes.

JVN [00:21:11] So if you're so stressed out that, like, you don't even want to, like, look at Harry Larry. Like, you don't even think they're cute at all.

ALICIA GARZA [00:21:19] Yeah.

JVN [00:21:20] And then I was like, this is just not good. So then I Googled and I was like, oh no. So yeah. How, how can, how, how do people exploit people? Like how do agencies exploit people worse?

ALICIA GARZA [00:21:33] Mmhmm. Well basically the way the agencies exploit people, one major way is that they classify people as independent contractors rather than as employees. So what it means is that they can be on these platforms. Right? And they can be accepting jobs, but they have to work a lot of jobs to be able to make enough money to take care of themselves and to provide themselves with benefits because the agency won't do it. Yeah? It's kind of like what Lyft and like Uber and, like, you know, there's, like, this big fight in California right now because they classify their workers wrong because they don't want to pay health care and benefits. So people be sick, you know, and of course, again, during the 'rona, here people be sick. But, you know, everybody needs a ride. And so then you'd be getting in a car and you're, like, "Oh, my God, I could be getting the 'rona right now." Because I happen to know for a fact that these folks are working to live. Right? And they don't have the ground underneath their feet to do so well. And that has a lot to do with the platforms that they're working on.

I think the other way that agencies can exploit people, right, is by driving down the wage. And because folks are often classified as independent contractors, it's like you can almost be put in a position of having to work for, like, a commission as opposed to having a salaried job. Right? And so that can be very, very complicated as well. But the other thing that I think people should just know, right, is that two things. Number one, in response to this, there's a lot of groups around the country who are part of our alliance that actually have aggregated workers and they employ a more fair process. So here in San Francisco, for example, we have La Colectiva de Mujeres, right? Which is the Women's Collective. And it's a bunch of domestic workers who have gotten together and they set wages for each other. So nobody works, right? Unless everybody is offering the same wage. And-

JVN [00:23:32] Oh, I love.

ALICIA GARZA [00:23:33] Is consistent. So if you want to find folks that you can trust in your area, visit us at DomesticWorkers.org and you can find a list of our affiliates. And a lot of our affiliates around the country are employing the same kind of model where essentially the workers have gotten together to set the standards that the state won't set to make sure that everybody is well taken care of and to make sure that people are not being abused while they're going to work. So there's that. And then the second thing is you can advocate at the state level and at the federal level. And really we might as well do it at the

federal level because then it impacts all the states. You can advocate for there to be a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights so that companies can't take advantage of domestic workers. And so that there's fair and even standards across the board. So you don't have to be, like, "Oh, my God. OK, well, I'm in California. We have a different set of rules here than you do in Texas than you do in Wisconsin." It's just the same set of rules for everybody. That's what it should be. That's what justice and equality is all about.

Oh. And speaking of which, you should just know, because I'm hoping we're gonna talk about the election at some point. Senator Kamala Harris is one of the, she is one of the people who introduced this bill federally alongside Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal. So.

JVN [00:24:51] I love her.

ALICIA GARZA [00:24:53] Fighting for us, every step of the way.

JVN [00:24:56] So what does the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, like, say in it? Like, what is it? What does it say? Tell me about it.

ALICIA GARZA [00:25:01] So one of the things that's important about the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights is that it sets standards across the board. It set standards for wages. It set standards for benefits. It sets standards for protections like against sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. The very basic things that should have been set in place years and years and years ago. So basically what it does is it closes the loophole that a really racist compromise that was made in 1930, right? During the New Deal, a racist compromise, like, kept all of this open. So it was like regulations for everybody except for Black and brown workers. Yeah? Domestic workers and agricultural workers got left out of this whole process because southern lawmakers and union leaders were, like, "Yeah, we're gonna have rights and regulations for workers, but not these workers because they're not white workers." So it just closes those loopholes.

JVN [00:25:56] And so, what are the things we're running into when we're trying to get it passed? Like, "It's not feasible." How do we, like, determine who that is? What are the solutions? Who should we support?

ALICIA GARZA [00:25:07] Well, what you do in this election cycle could open up so many opportunities for domestic workers. It's been an uphill battle, frankly, because we are dealing with an administration that, honestly, like, doesn't believe in human rights, doesn't believe in any level of regulation, basically doesn't believe that, like, women are people or people of color are people. And that's a huge problem. It's a huge barrier to like changing any kind of rules or laws. Or making better laws or better rules for anyone. So if you really

want to support what we're doing at the Domestic Workers Alliance number one, vote! I can't even say it loud enough, like vote, vote, vote, vote, vote, vote. It hella matters.

Because the truth of the matter is, you know, a bill, a federal bill needs to be passed by, it needs to be introduced, it needs to be passed through the House. And needs to be passed through the Senate. And right now, you know, control of the Senate is not on our side. And we had a wave, right, in 2018 where we elected more women of color than ever in the history of the house. Right? And we need to keep that momentum. It has real impacts for changing the lives of so many people. I know a lot of people think the voting doesn't matter, but I'm giving you an exact reason why it does.

If anybody in your family has ever cleaned homes or taken care of somebody else's kids or been abused or exploited in their workplace, maybe, you know, their, their employer was flirting with them or, you know, sexually harassing them, making it unsafe for them to do the job that they're needing to be paid for or even if anybody, you know, has ever not been paid for putting in work. Your vote totally matters. So if you want to help, number one, you can call your congressperson and let them know that you want to see the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights make, become law. And the second thing you can do is vote so that we can change the balance of power in Congress and make sure that we're able to pass bigger and better laws that protect all of us.

JVN [00:28:11] I feel like there's just a lot of people too, who even reading the title of this episode would think, like, "What? I don't really have anything to do with this. Like, I can't, like what do I have to do with domestic workers?" But it's, like, is there someone that comes to your house once a week, once a month? Do you have a family member who is in a nursing home? Like, really there are, like, and when you think of it like that, like a lot of people like have that in their lives.

ALICIA GARZA [00:28:37] Yeah.

JVN [00:28:38] And so, and then it's like and a lot of those, and I think it is really important to think about the difference between like an independent contractor and a W2 employee, because fundamentally, like, the way I was, have been described the difference is that, like, a W2 employee is someone where you can say, like, "I need you there at 10:30, I need you there till 7:00." Like, it's more like exacting because, and if you are a W2, like, you are on the hook for providing health insurance, benefits, if you do it for one person in your company, you have to do it for everyone, which I think is part of the Affordable Care Act, which is amazing, which I love that's story and that's how it should be.

ALICIA GARZA [00:29:11] That's right.

JVN [00:29:11] Then a 1099 person is, like, you're an independent contractor, like, you maybe have, like, lots of jobs, like maybe you do this, but then you do that, then you do the other things, so, like, you're kind of on your own for all that stuff because you're going to go do your own thing.

ALICIA GARZA [00:29:23] Yep.

JVN [00:29:24] So, but when it comes to people like Uber or that you brought that up earlier which is so important, maybe that person does do, maybe there is someone who is more 1099 and they do that here and there. But actually that's not really the case.

ALICIA GARZA [00:29:35] That's right.

JVN [00:29:35] Because Uber, I'm pretty sure, says that you have to, like, isn't it true for Uber drivers that, like, you have to do, like, X amount a week or you can't do it?

ALICIA GARZA [00:29:42] Yep. Yep.

JVN [00:29:43] So that to me says, like, well, you might not have to be there at 7:00 in the morning, but you at least have to do it enough that you hit those 20 hours a week or whatever.

ALICIA GARZA [00:29:50] That's right.

JVN [00:29:50] And what it all comes down to is, like, money and, like, overhead, because if you have to provide health insurance benefits a month or retirement funds a month, that is money off of your bottom line that people may or may not want to pay. But it's, like, I just think that there's this misconception that, like, more regulations are, like, a headache and they're anti-business or, like, whatever. But we now have this system where, like so many people are literally getting, like, abused and they're ending up in harm's way because, like, they are not afforded, like, PPE in the case of like an Uber driver.

ALICIA GARZA [00:30:21] That's right.

JVN [00:30:22] Like, they need masks, like, they need sanitizer. We are like in, and I actually had a family member who, like, and another thing, you know, speaking of Covid and the election, because there isn't, like, an even way that things are going through.

ALICIA GARZA [00:30:32] That's right.

JVN [00:30:33] Did get exposed to someone who had Covid. My mom is really at risk. So this is another family member. And the doctor was telling them about, "Oh, well, you weren't in a car with them and it's all about a car.: And if you're in a car with them for like 10 to 20 minutes, that's where you really need to be worried. So that was, like, my working thesis with Covid for like from June to like now. I'm like, "Oh, my God, I'm not going to get a car. It's all about the car, honey." Like this one random doctor in a rural hospital said something about a car. And so now I'm scared of cars, honey.

ALICIA GARZA [00:33:59] That's right. That's right.

JVN [00:31:00] So it's like, because, like, no one knows. It's, like, this rapidly evolving virus, so no one really knows what the rules are because there isn't, like, a common consensus. But this idea of, you know, a domestic worker or front line worker, like, it is a grocery store person is, like, a front line worker.

ALICIA GARZA [00:31:14] That's right.

JVN [00:31:15] An Uber driver is a front line worker now, those are literally keeping the wheels going. And, but what that means is that someone's got to pay.

ALICIA GARZA [00:31:22] That's right.

JVN [00:31:23] Like someone's going to have to pay for this stuff. And at the end of the day, like, Uber is made a whole bunch of money. A lot of tech companies have made a whole bunch of money and with a lot of money and success, like, you need to give, you gotta give back.

ALICIA GARZA [00:31:35] That's right.

JVN [00:31:36] And I think it's also kind of human nature to, like, want to blame and to really be, like, mad as hell and, like, just fuckin' pissed. But then it's like, "Well, I'm such a small part in this, like, what am I really going to do?" But I think that's part of what I was trying to say earlier. And it's so cool that what you've done is you've actually used some of like that Repub, that Republican ingenuity of like.

ALICIA GARZA [00:31:53] That's right.

JVN [00:31:54] Well, this shit is all unregulated. So let's, like, use this un-regulation to actually help people with, like, Alia and with the Domestic Workers Alliance. And that's beautiful. So I'm kind of obsessed with that, that you've been able to-

ALICIA GARZA [00:32:06] It's that so cool?

JVN [00:32:07] I think. Yeah. Oh! I actually had, this took a turn. Yes, Alia, but I wrote down, it's like immigration because that feels like this big separate thing where, like, if I'm thinking about Domestic Workers Alliance, it's, like, if you're, like, from the United States, like, have your whatever, like to based on what, isn't that such a dividing force for, like, the work that's going on? Because, like, they don't want to help Dreamers. They don't want, not you. I'm saying Republicans. So because, like, I mean, I feel, like, California's kind of been cooler. So I feel like that would maybe help domestic workers more there, whether you're doc, undocumented or not. 'Cause maybe you could get access to some of the, I'm just, I have no clue for fact on this. I'm literally opining just based off what I know about the California legislature.

ALICIA GARZA [00:32:48] Yep.

JVN [00:32:58] But then if you're dealing with like an Arkansas or a Tennessee and you're, like, "Well, I want to advocate for, like, people that maybe are undocumented and they're working in this," but it's, like, they try to, like, make it illegal for the people trying to help the people.

ALICIA GARZA [00:33:01] That's right.

JVN [00:33:01] In a lot of those places.

ALICIA GARZA [00:33:02] That's right, that's right. Well, let me say, let's, let's go back for a second, because I think for people who are listening right now, there's different entry points, right? Some people will be like, "It's important to do because we should, we should be better to each other." Other people be, like, "I don't understand why I should care about this. That's not my problem. You know, I have a steady job. I'm salaried, whatever." But I want to make two points that I think kind of bring all these things together. So one, more and more people are actually gig workers. Working freelance. Right? And don't have access to the basic things that you need. And it's not just immigrant workers. Right? There's a lot of white workers who are out here doing, you know, jobs that should be paying you more, frankly. But the way that they don't pay you more is that under the guise of, like, you being self-employed, right, it's like, cool, then you worry about your own health insurance and you worry about all your own stuff.

And then when a pandemic hits, right, you be, like, "Oh, this is deeply, deeply unfair," because it is! There should be a system that everybody can basically be a part of where, regardless of whether you make a million dollars a year or, like, ten thousand dollars a year, that you have access to basic needs. So there's that. Second thing, though, is that here's the facts. Everybody at some point in our lives is going to need care. And I can tell you right this minute that every eight seconds somebody in this country turns 65 and doesn't have the things that they need to live well. I can tell you right now that most people who I talk to don't actually have a plan for what it means to get older, don't have a contingency plan for what it means when you get sick.

And there are more and more people in our country every single day who are what we call the sandwich generation, people who are taking care of aging parents and people who are taking care of kids all at the same time. And the fact of the matter is, technology has made it so that we can't do everything. We can't, but we're expected to do more and more. And when you have a crisis, right, is when you depend on somebody else to help the most. And frankly, we don't have enough people trained to do this work. We don't pay people well enough to do this work and to do it safely. And so we're all at risk here. And that cuts across income level, etcetera. There are very poor people right now who actually are doing, taking care of parents, taking care of kids and don't have any kind of net. And then there's middle income people who are taking care of parents, taking care of kids and can't actually afford to get the help they need. But we all know we need it.

And so, at the end of the day, it's like a ticking time bomb. And the more we push it off, the worse it is. And unfortunately, we have a president and an administration who I think has made it cool not to care. And what that does is it pushes crises off until you can't push it off anymore. Just look at the 'rona. I mean, literally, we walked into this, into this year with a president who basically said the 'rona was a liberal hoax to steal the election. Then he got the damn 'rona. OK? And you know what? He had excellent care. But also he still has the 'rona and all these people that he's been spreading the 'rona to now have the 'rona. So now we know it's not a liberal hoax to steal the election. Now we know that everybody is susceptible to it, whether you rich, poor, Black, white, whatever. Everybody has, is, is susceptible to getting this plague. Right?

And because we've kicked care down the road farther and farther. And because you're right, there is an ethos in this country where people want to do it cheaper. People want to do it faster. That's where the whole immigration conversation comes in. I mean, people who don't like immigration should really want to change the economy because the economy is structured as such. Where literally it is like nobody wants to pay for work. Nobody wants to pay for workers. And so as a result. Right? What happens is that we are

driving an economy that is deeply unsustainable. So there's a lot of things we can do. But the first thing is, even if you like, don't care about other people, but you only care about yourself, just know, right, at some point you're gonna need care. And we don't have the infrastructure to take care of you or for you to be able to access the care you're going to need.

And then, number two, you really should care about other people because we depend on each other to survive. The pandemic taught us that. So if one person is not safe, you're also not safe. And there's no other time in recent history that I can remember that that has been so deeply clear. I depend on grocery delivery. I depend on, you know, all levels of care. And let me tell you, since I'm in my house all the damn time. This house needs to be clean, child. So I have an interest in making sure that somebody could come in here and not spread the 'rona around, but also not get it from me and spread it to their families. It's a big deal. So all of us need this at some point. So I will come into it from that perspective.

JVN [00:38:10] We're gonna take a really quick break and we'll be right back with more Alicia Garza after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." This is Jonathan Van Ness. That is a really good way to think about it, that we all have a vested interest because everyone is going to need help and support in this way at some point. I wrote down a lot of things as we were talking about that. One is the ACA and the Affordable Care Act, and that is one way in which some of those loopholes were closed in terms of employers and unfair benefits in, well, unfair administration of health benefits to their employees. And it, and it was a start. That has been under threat ever since 45 won. So that's one, one other thing to think about it.

The other thing I wrote down is, is unions and unions are another thing that have been under threat. And unions where another agency, even though it was imperfect of collective bargaining against like a corrupt corporation, trying to take, trying to literally exploit workers, even though they let people out. That's still a model where, like, that, even that model of trying to help workers is under attack from this administration. So that's two tools in which to help folks in anywhere around this realm have been under attack, which is really important to drive home the issue of voting.

And the other thing I wrote down is this, the social safety net or the lack thereof. And I literally, when I found out I had HIV, I had the resources to frankly lie, cheat, and steal, to kind-, well, even though it was my own money. It's the story in my book. But, like, I was able to, like, kind of, like, fudge with this guy to, like, get, like, some money that, like, my grandpa given to me. But I wasn't supposed to be able to use it so I could, like, which was like the last four grand I was ever gonna really be able to get from it, as a result of that. But I did that so that I could get to the HIV social safety net of California. And I knew if I was

gonna get cut off from my family, I was, like, "Well, I can at least, but I mean, if you get newly diagnosed with HIV in Missouri or Arkansas or Tennessee and you can't find money to move to California."

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:03] Yep.

JVN [00:40:03] "Bye." And even now, since 2012, that social safety net in California has been worn back.

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:11] Yep.

JVN [00:40:11] So there's so many ways that, that we need to support each other more. But I think that a Domestic Bill, a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. I just said that right, right?

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:19] Yep, you did.

JVN [00:40:21] Yeah. Is such an important place for us to start. Because if we can come at it from a collective place that we all have a vested interest, it's kind of like the wealth tax, like, if we all just, like, pitched in, like, two cents, like, maybe not even on the dollars, just, like, two cents period.

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:34] Yeah.

JVN [00:40:34] I bet we could totally sort this out and get like benefits.

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:36] Yeah.

JVN [00:40:37] And health and like, I mean if we all come at it together.

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:39] That's right.

JVN [00:40:40] And just know that we do. It doesn't have to be a place of blame and frustration. But just we all do have a part to play in it, however big or small.

ALICIA GARZA [00:40:51] That's absolutely right. You said it. Boom.

JVN [00:40:55] So it's, like, it's, like, the end of it. but we didn't really get to talk about why this initiative is so important to you, which I only know about because I was, like, researching and watching your other interviews. But I should have fucking shared that with

other people here. Do you want to share that in a little bit, but it's such a big story. No, it's, like, the wrong point in an interview to talk about it.

ALICIA GARZA [00:41:13] It's OK.

JVN [00:41:14] But it's, OK, so anyway.

ALICIA GARZA [00:41:16] I mean, it's OK. I mean, I'll just say that for me, the reason that I care about this so much is because my grandmother did domestic work for most of her, you know, adult life. My mom did domestic work when she was trying to figure out what it meant to have a child alone. And she didn't expect to have a child alone. And she got pregnant with me and she was in a relationship and she thought they were getting married and then things fell apart. So there she was, you know, pregnant, getting ready to have a baby and all of a sudden having to reorient herself around how to do it alone. My mom worked a million jobs, and one of those jobs was domestic work. So to me, this is really the story of Black women's power and resilience in this country. And what I know is that when we address this crisis, this crisis of care, that we're actually addressing the core issue that is impacting everybody across this country, rich, poor, white, Black, you know, immigrant citizen, whatever.

And also, frankly, I want us to be the heroes in our own stories. I mean, when I think about my mom and how hard she worked to be able to put a roof over my head. Both when she was single and then, of course, when she remarried to my dad later, I think, I always saw my mom as this superhero. She was always the person who was up late at night trying to figure out how to make everything work. And I also know that she had dreams of her own that she wasn't able to pursue. And I don't think she regretted that, you know, I mean, my mom was kind of a ride or die. But I do think that we should all have the choice to pursue our dreams when we're awake. And so that's why I do this work.

JVN [00:43:10] That was really incred, it was so touching, love. So your new book, "The Purpose of Power," it's coming out so soon.

ALICIA GARZA [00:43:16] So soon.

JVN [00:43:17] Podcast, your podcasts, "Lady Don't Take No" and "Sunstorm." Black Futures Lab. Where can people? Those are some of the places. But where can people really dir-, like, listening now, and I know that they're still with us because you're just, people love listening to you. Where can people direct their time and energy to stick with you and all the work that you're doing? Other than what I just said.

ALICIA GARZA [00:43:37] Well, please, please, please grab the book. It's on presale right now. Everywhere you get your books. And it's called "The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart." It is my story, right, about how I came to become a change maker. And what I love about this book is that it pulls no punches. Right? We talk about my story to help illuminate the lessons that I've learned along the way, the things that I'm still learning and the things I'm unlearning. And the hope is that it inspires us, each of us, to find our own lane and help to create the change that we so desperately deserve. And I think I'll just give you a sneak peek of the secret of the book, which is that hashtags don't actually start movements. People do. And so this book is really for people who want to learn how you can become a person who helps to lift up and push forward a movement that is bent on changing all of our lives for the better.

JVN [00:44:35] "The Purpose of Power," preorder it, also on the preorder note, I am preordering, but still send me one, because I can't wait an entire week.

ALICIA GARZA [00:44:42] I have a signed copy for you. Yes.

JVN [00:44:45] But I want to pre-order because we got to get those numbers. I know how pre-order numbers work.

ALICIA GARZA [00:44:49] Yes, thank you.

JVN [00:44:50] It's so important, we are supporting, we are doing it. Yes. Put one on my cart, put one on the company's card. We are doing two. Yes.

ALICIA GARZA [00:44:56] Oh, and it comes out on audiobook, too, because, you know, we do it cute and I'm narrating and-.

JVN [00:45:00] Yes.

ALICIA GARZA [00:45:01] Can I just share, also, that what's so cool about the audio book? What's so cool about it is that it has a score and the score is being done by the one, the only D'Wayne Wiggins from Tony, Tony, Tony, award winning producer, songwriter, all the things. Oh, my gosh, I'm so excited about it. So, you know, we just keep giving you gifts and gifts and gifts. So, you know, if you're not, like, a book book reader, then get the audio book and get some of this town business, you know what I mean?

JVN [00:45:31] There is no better way to end this interview. Alicia Garza, thank you so much for your time. Thank you so much for all of your work and just for everything that you do. We love you so much.

ALICIA GARZA [00:45:40] Oh. Love you. Love you. Thank you so much for having me. And more soon.

JVN [00:45:46] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was the activist, organizer, and writer Alicia Garza. She's the Director of Strategy & Partnerships for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the principal at the Black Futures Lab, and the co-creator of the Black Lives Matter Global Network.

Her podcasts are Lady Don't Take No and Sunstorm, and her new book is The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe.

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