

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? FRONTLINE ACTIVISTS TALK ELECTION '24 TAKEAWAYS

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LAURA FLANDERS - Tens of millions of Americans cast their ballots in one of the most divisive elections in our lifetime, and brought us here, a blowout comeback for Donald Trump and the MAGA right. So what happens next? What are the teachings and takeaways from this historic election season and what lies ahead for people, the planet, and the US democratic project? On November 6, I am happy to gather a group of thinkers and doers to help us all think through this moment and consider next steps. Joining me are Guerline Jozef, Founder and Executive Director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, which is the only Haitian American-led organization, serving migrants at the US/Mexico border; Judith LeBlanc, a citizen of the Caddo Nation and Executive Director of the Native Organizers Alliance is with us; and Serena Sebring, Executive Director of Blueprint North Carolina, a progressive ecosystem of nearly 60 groups working to build inclusive democracy in North Carolina. Well, first off, I just want to thank all of you for being with me and everyone here at Laura Flanders & Friends. This was a rough night and I am happy to be with you today. And I'll start with the question that I often start with to help us sort of land where we are and begin this conversation. And that is, who is uppermost in your mind, on your mind, on your heart as we start to talk? Let's start with you, Judith.

JUDITH LEBLANC - I am thinking so much about my grandchildren. I am thinking about the people who've walked on the land where I have been leading up to the elections, which is the Crow Nation in Montana. And I'm thinking about not only what they were doing, but how they felt when they were doing it. And I'm thinking about my grandchildren about how they will feel when they look back on the 2024 elections. And in both instances, it keeps me in balance. It gives me hope.

LAURA FLANDERS - Guerline, what about you? Who's uppermost in your thoughts this morning?

GUERLINE JOZEF - I am thinking about the people whose lives are at risk of deportation, the 11 million undocumented people who have been giving everything to the United States, but their future is uncertain. I am thinking of our children. I am thinking of what it might look like for the next four years, but the result that can go beyond that. But I am determined, undeterred, I have buckled up my seatbelt and I am ready to push forward.

LAURA FLANDERS - Thank you, Guerline. And coming to you, Serena, we have followed your work over the last four years. I know you have worked your heart out. How's your heart today?

SERENA SEBRING - Hmm. My heart is with Black women today, with myself, with my daughters, with my partners, with my neighbors. And I think as Guerline said, steadfast, steadfast, steadying. I'm breathing this morning. You know, it is our work, but it is also our lives that we're making sense of this morning as we wake up. And I'm, of course, thinking of my children and my community. There's a lot to be proud of today too. And so I think I wake up with a mixed bag of emotions. My first thought was, I don't trust anybody who knows the right thing to say today. And I hope nobody expects that of me.

LAURA FLANDERS - Fair enough. And may I echo that emotion? Let's pick up where you started, Judith, which is, what did happen in this election? Not just what happened, but how it happened and the energy and emotion that went into so much of it? Are there stories you want to share about how this campaign was waged by the people that you worked with, Judith?

JUDITH LEBLANC - There's only one thing to say the day after. And that yesterday was a good day. It was a good day. And I told many across the country who were working in 12 states with over 160 moccasins on the ground for the last two months. I said, "Everybody enjoy this day because we are reaping all of the good things and the good feelings among our people. And we're going to give a snapshot to the world really about who our people are." The Native power that we have been leveraging under the Biden-Harris administration is still rising, that we have much to be proud of because of the structural and very real reforms that we made happen under the Biden-Harris administration, and that we are going to be building on those experiences. I'm very realistic that the Right wing ideology has influenced a sector of my community. And so we have a lot of work to do, but I will quote one person, "It's good work. It's hard work. It's joyful work."

LAURA FLANDERS - What about you, Serena? An extraordinary day in North Carolina, by all accounts, no question.

SERENA SEBRING - Extraordinary. I mean, we saw record turnout over and above the records that were already set in 2020. We saw record turnout across every demographic in our state, every corner, even the counties, the 25 particularly impacted by the storm Helene. North Carolina voters were unstoppable. They faced tremendous odds, intimidation at the polls, misinformation, a new process of voter ID, long lines, and we saw them show up again and again in record numbers. We did our very best as team justice to support them. I'm so proud of our team, and by that I mean our staff, but also this team justice that came together over the last, well, four years to prepare for this moment. We are in fact bigger, stronger, more tightly knit

together, and we know how to collaborate and work under the harshest conditions. And so I have some hope, but also just a tremendous amount of pride to be in this state of a hundred counties of hometown heroes who believe in our power.

LAURA FLANDERS - Guerline, coming to you, one of the big fears going into the night was that people who might fear that they would be perceived as immigrants would not dare to vote because of the threats that were articulated in the run up to the election. What did you actually see there at the Bridge Alliance?

GUERLINE JOZEF - What we saw within the Haitian American community, but specifically around Black immigrant communities around the country, we saw a lot of hope. We saw a lot of vigor. But throughout the night, I started seeing texts and messages of people being discouraged, but we also saw people giving them booster saying, "No, please don't be discouraged. This is just another step in the fight." And now as we are looking into the United States, specifically as Black people and Black immigrants, how are we going to move forward? The level of potential harms that is staggered around Black immigrants, around Haitian immigrants, and we saw days leading to the elections, how they doctored fake videos to show, you know, undocumented Haitians going to vote. And we understand very clearly that we are in a time where we need to bring our communities together.

LAURA FLANDERS - Some of the things that you've mentioned, of course, weaponized deep fake videos, social media, we'll come in for a lot of analysis and criticism in the years to come. I don't know about control, but we'll talk about that. Another thing that concerned many of us was threats of violence. And we did see, well, according to Timothy Snyder's Substack, a serious problem of Russian instigated bomb threats. Not real bombs, no real violence, but threats in five states, no fewer than 32 polling stations in Georgia. And in Arizona in Navajo country, apparently four sites targeted with these threats. Again, just threats, but suggesting a serious problem. Judith, did you follow any of that? Was that significant?

JUDITH LEBLANC - One of the characteristics of the last four years since the last Trump administration has been a dramatic escalation of threats, not political violence, but the threat of violence. And that is enough to suppress the vote. That is enough to disrupt the organizing that is so necessary. And the bomb threats, when you look at where they were called in, on Navajo, in Arizona, in Georgia.

LAURA FLANDERS - Philadelphia.

JUDITH LEBLANC - Exactly, where Black and Native voters were the margin of victory for either side. And the truth is that we have to understand that those are the kinds of disruptions that we will face not only in the next four years, but we've always faced that. You know, it's not a new

phenom, but I think that community safety and how we organize to help people stay in balance, to walk, as the Navajo say, in beauty where you're 360 degree aware. We have been living that. We have been living like that, but now we have to be even more discerning because the politics of division will not go away until this system is a much more deeply democratic and economic system.

LAURA FLANDERS - Serena, one of the fears that we heard raised the last time we spoke with you and your colleagues in North Carolina was that you would see the threat of political violence in the form of armed militia, Proud Boys, at polling stations, that kind of thing. Did those threats materialize, that effort at intimidation?

SERENA SEBRING - Not in the way that they did in 2020. So we saw a different kind of threat at the polls. There were certainly threats of violence. We heard through the hotline results of voters who were threatened with physical violence in line, but also just aggressive electioneering. And we move in a time of political violence. So for many voters, it was difficult to tell the difference between fervent electioneering and when there was a white supremacist threat. And unfortunately, that's maybe because there's not much difference between the two in this time. But I think, you know, we also saw the lessons that we learned in 2020 about how to keep ourselves and our communities safe, really pay off.

LAURA FLANDERS - I do have to ask you, Guerline, you and your organization was part of a citizen's lawsuit against Trump and Vance around those accusations of Haitian immigrants in the Springfield, Ohio area. What happens to that lawsuit now? Can you tell us any more about it? And are you personally concerned for your and your organization's safety?

GUERLINE JOZEF - Laura, we have been under extreme attack since the whole thing began with Ohio and understood very clearly that the whole story was created to destabilize the moment. We did file criminal complaint against both former President Trump and Senator Vance for the level of potential hate crimes that we saw starting in Springfield, Ohio, where they had bomb threats almost every day. They were forced to close their schools, children were afraid to be in school. They were closed to put hospitals and banks in high alert. We clearly understand that as we are moving forward to President Trump, Vice President Vance administration, what that will look for us as a community where we were forced to close our offices, where we were forced to pull down our hotlines? We were doxxed both personally and as a community and the organizations. We had congressional members in Louisiana, making extreme violent comments, not only about the community, the organization, but us as people saying that if Trump wins, we need to pack up. I cannot say the words that they used, but we need to pack up and leave the country before January 20, 2025. But this is my country. As a Black being in America, I know how to fight. And as a descendant of freedom fighters, that is what I am ready for.

LAURA FLANDERS - For people that don't know what the term doxxing, what does it really mean, Guerline?

GUERLINE JOZEF - Doxxing is when they... People will put your life at risk. They will publish your home address and they will tell people if things don't go certain way, they know where to go. So that created a lot of fear within the community. Our staff, our team were afraid to even go to work. That's how serious it was. Our staff is under attack and they are fearful. So we are really asking for everyone to join us in making sure that our community is protected.

LAURA FLANDERS - This is a frontline activists group, and I appreciate that your work is not at the level of political punditry and at the level of party politics. But I do want each of you to address what would be your message perhaps to the Democratic party.

SERENA SEBRING - I would say, listen to this moment, take it in really, really, and let's learn from it. Let's learn what we invested in, what opportunities were missed, and what we can do differently for more of us together next time. I think that this is, and just to be honest, this is a mixed moment in North Carolina, right? We did see a crisis averted at the level of our governor. And so I don't want to lose that as much as we have to acknowledge the impact of a Trump victory at the presidential level.

LAURA FLANDERS - Yeah, so Josh Stein, the former Attorney General, will be the first Jewish governor of North Carolina.

SERENA SEBRING - Yes. And what we did not do was elect the mini Trumps that were slated at some points in this race to win both our governor's office and our state superintendent's office. And those are victories of the people. But the Democratic party should listen to what the people in North Carolina and the South are saying and not play this swing state game again, because I think we can see it did not work.

LAURA FLANDERS - Yeah. Judith.

JUDITH LEBLANC - I would say organizing is our medicine. It's our medicine in Indian country. It's the medicine all across Turtle Island. The Democrats have to learn about what real organizing is. It's about relationship building. And politics and elections are not an inside game. You know, the Democratic party runs campaigns as though it's an inside game. It's not. We're talking about moving majorities. And if the Democratic party cannot, it does not rely on the organizers who we represent to move majorities, they're going to be losing on and on and on.

GUERLINE JOZEF - As an independent voter, I think that the Democratic party continues to take our votes for granted, continues to take immigrants' votes and Black votes and Indigenous

votes, and people of color's vote for granted. And as Judith mentioned, they are not valuing our organizing. They are not really investing in local organizing to make sure that people are where they need to be. So this is definitely a lesson learned and we do hope that they will change how they're moving forward and really understanding how crucial independent voters are and how critical that local communities, underserved communities, they need to address the needs of those communities, not just come when they meet the vote, but really address our issues.

LAURA FLANDERS - And Oprah alone won't do it for you. Let's close with next steps. What would be your next steps? Judith, let's start with you.

JUDITH LEBLANC - The next steps are very, very clear. Number one, we must recognize and lift up and honor everything that we've done up until yesterday. That's a first step, to be aware of the power that we hold when we're organized. The second next step is to contextualize political violence or the threat of it. Violence will not solve the complicated, political problems we face in the 21st century. Pure and simple. And that takes a lot of spiritual and political discipline. That means that we cannot adopt the tactics of those who seek to oppress, suppress us. We cannot adopt the tactics of the system. And thirdly, 50 state strategy, organizing in all the states.

LAURA FLANDERS - Guerline.

GUERLINE JOZEF - Get back to the basics. Prioritize people's needs and center the realities impacted populations. Completely agree to everything that Judith mentioned, but understanding that our North star is justice. Our North star is love and compassion. And so we are ready to move forward in that direction.

LAURA FLANDERS - Serena.

SERENA SEBRING - I think that our next step has to be assessment, has to be a real careful study of what exactly happened in this cycle and not a rush to reaction and not a let's lie down and give up the ghosts, like we have to and we are capable of learning and growing stronger in this moment. And I think that's what we must do and take our time to do that.

LAURA FLANDERS - Finally, we ask at the end of every episode of Laura Flanders & Friends what we think the story will be that the future tells of this moment. I feel as if turning point is perhaps an overused phrase, but let me ask you, what do you think is the story the future will tell of now, Guerline?

GUERLINE JOZEF - I think that the future might say that we were not ready for a woman of color to lead us into the next step, which is very unfortunate. I think that the future will tell us to refocus our priorities. I do believe that history will judge us harshly, especially when it comes to

our children the next generation, LGBTQ, and other people who are fighting for a better life. But I also believe that there are possibilities that are coming up in how people can change. I believe in the power of change.

LAURA FLANDERS - Thank you. Serena.

SERENA SEBRING - I think that the future will look back and hold us accountable. And I welcome that. I know that, we, in my partnership on my staff and myself did the best. We brought our very best here. And so all we can learn is about how we can bring more. And I believe that the future we'll see that we have learned lessons and grown stronger over time.

LAURA FLANDERS - Judith, you get the last word.

JUDITH LEBLANC - The story will be about resilience. It will be a story of how we faced difficulties and our power began to rise. Our strength, our spiritual belief systems guided us to look to the horizon for the strategic way to get there. We will use discernment and discernment breeds resilience.

LAURA FLANDERS - Judith LeBlanc, Serena Sebring, and Guerline Jozef, thank you so much all of you for joining me.

LAURA FLANDERS - Hot takes on the presidential race. Well, here are just a few. I'd say it's hard to run for president, both on and against the economic record of the administration that you've been part of for four years. I'd say it's hard to run against autocracy and for peace and against violence and simultaneously be part of an administration that is flowing weapons to an autocrat abroad who is violating all those things. I'd say that it is hard to be the first woman of color running for president in a continent as big as ours and campaign in all the states in just 100 days. And it is hard to talk about democracy of the people when you're dependent on big dollar donations from a few. So those are my hot takes on the top of the ticket. But here at Laura Flanders & Friends, our focus is at the base, at the root, where are the places that are cultivating connection, caring, and fortifying those people and those ideas that will take this democratic project of us forward into a brighter day. What are we each of us able to do to keep places of connection open? That will be what I'll be thinking about in the next few weeks and months and what we will be striving to do right here. In the meantime, stay kind, stay curious. Don't forget you can get the full uncut version of today's conversation through subscribing to our free podcast. All the information's at the website, and we'll be back next time with more Laura Flanders and Friends. Till then, for Laura Flanders and Friends, I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.

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