

INDEX

601 for Period Equity, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9
Atlanta, 4, 5, 9
Black, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Black Woman, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
Brown, Asia, 2, 4, 5, 9
Brown, Maisie, 5
COVID 19 Pandemic, 2, 3
Floyd, George, 5
Girl Talk, 5
Grassroots, 2, 3, 5, 8
Homegirl Project, 2, 5, 7
India, 2
Instagram, 5, 7, 8
Jackson, 4, 5
Liberation, 3,7,8
Los Angeles, 2
Menstruators, 4, 6
Misogynoir, 2, 5, 7
Mississippi, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
Mississippi Youth Council, 2, 6, 8
Pad Project, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
Period Equity, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9
Period Poverty, 2, 4, 6, 9
Sex Education, 2, 3, 8
Spelman College, 2, 4, 9
TikTok, 7
Trump, Donald, 2
Twitter, 7
Vicksburg, 2, 3, 4

LAILA BROWN – INTERVIEWED BY PHONE ON 11/20/2021

Laila Brown (she/her) is a 16-year-old junior in high school from Vicksburg, Mississippi. She co-founded 601 for Period Equity, a grassroots organization that advocates, educates, and provides to eliminate period poverty. Laila has also worked with Teen Health Mississippi's Youth Council to advocate for comprehensive sex education. She is also a student ambassador at the Pad Project and a part of the Homegirl Project's editorial team. Laila is dedicated to using her advocacy to fighting period poverty and educating people about misogynoir.

DIYA PATEL

Okay, so, before we begin, I want to say that if at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or don't wish to answer a question, just let me know and we can skip that question or that part.

LAILA BROWN

Okay.

DIYA PATEL

Okay, to start off can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got involved in youth activism in general?

LAILA BROWN

Okay, well, my name is Laila Brown, I'm 16 years old and I'm from Vicksburg, Mississippi. I have grown up all my life in Mississippi and that's really what pulled me towards youth activism. Especially considering I was in like awkward stages of middle school wise, when the 2016 election happened of former President Donald Trump. So that influenced me to get into activism, especially as a young person. I really didn't actually start getting active until about 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and I had a lot of time on my hands. I actually signed up for a lot of different advocacy work. Even though at the time, it was a lot to handle, it helped me get a feel for what I liked, and what I didn't like within the activism space. I signed up for Mississippi Youth Council¹, which basically was a very structured and political and civic engagement advocacy organization. Where we advocated for comprehensive sex education in this city public schools. Which, if you didn't know, are extremely conservative and we basically have abstinence-based sex education. Which means you don't get taught anything need to be taught. Then I also signed up for the Pad Project² to be a student ambassador. Which is an organization based in Los Angeles, that was started by high school students a couple of years ago and they are international organization. They're award winning for the Netflix documentary that they did in conjunction with the people in India where they basically send people pad and things that they can provide for themselves also have access to pads. They're a period equity organization, I was a student ambassador for them, and still currently am. Then I also signed up

¹ [Mississippi Youth Council](#)

² [The Pad Project](#)

to be a fellow for the Homegirl Project³. I've created an educational program for them about misogynoir, which is the oppression of black women, and the history of that essentially and black women activism. Then I also created my own organization, which is kind of how you Diya got in contact and learned about me and my work. Basically 601 Period Equity, I co-founded it in January of this year 2021 with my sister Asian Brown, who is a college student at Spelman College. It was basically sparked because we both got very passionate about period poverty as being fellow ambassadors for the pad project, but we specifically got involved, especially because we're both Black and Black women are disproportionately affected by period poverty, which is poverty in general. Then also things like menstruation-based disorders and diseases like endometriosis and things like that. That's where I am right now, in terms of my activism. I'm no longer involved in the Mississippi Youth Council anymore because I kind of figured out that I really prefer grassroots activism over something that's more politicized. So that's why I'm still involved with the Homegirl Project as a writer. I'm still involved with the Pad Project as a student ambassador, obviously, still running 601 for Period Equity ⁴from Vicksburg, Mississippi currently.

PATEL

That's a lot of amazing work that you're involved with. Can you tell me a little bit more about how you came about kind of realizing that you want to be involved in grassroots organizations more than politicized work?

BROWN

I think it's because I kind of grew in my politics. I used to have more faith in politics and the US political system, but being Black and a woman, and middle class from Mississippi, which is like the deep South, has made me a little bit disillusioned with the political system, because it's very, very hard to get work done. At the end of the day, my goal isn't necessarily representation, or, to have a lot of diverse people in the government, it's more to be liberated from all forms of oppression. It's more than just getting equal. It's about getting free to me now. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that people have really fell on hard times because of the COVID 19 pandemic. It's a buildup of a lot of things and it's really just about my own personal education. Also, I think it's because grassroots organizations, to me seem a little bit more radical, it's harder to really get your actual feelings across, whenever you have to kind of water your views down for politicians, especially being in the deep south with a lot of white conservative male politicians. It's heavily white men in the representative government, so you can't just say, "Oh, we want comprehensive sex education, we want to talk about LGBTQ people's experiences with sex, we want to talk about condoms, we want to talk about abortion, we want to talk about this and that," because that's immediately going to turn them off, and you can't really get anywhere with them that way.

PATEL

Absolutely. Coming to that realization is just so amazing.

³ [Homegirl Project](#)

⁴ [601 for Period Equity](#)

BROWN

Yeah.

PATEL

So, you were involved in the pad project as an ambassador if I remember correctly.

BROWN

Yes.

PATEL

And how did that work help you co-find 601 for Period Equity? Was there like any correlation between what you learned in the pet project, given that it was such a global organization? And then 601 for Period Equity, it's a grassroots organization.

BROWN

Yeah, there's a heavy correlation between the two. We probably would not have created 601 for Period Equity if it had not been for our experience with the Pad Project. Luckily it was a very positive experience, because Asia and I were able to do a project together for them, we curated the social media for Black History Month in a way that highlighted Black menstruators. So that obviously includes Black women, Black transmen who menstruate and Black non-binary people who menstruate. We were able to not only represent menstruators, but Black menstruators. Our specific experiences being both Black and menstruating at the same time. And so that in our experiences with people who they connected us with (amazing people who are Black people who have their own Black led period organizations and learning about the different things in history that happened with Black women and Black menstruators) and understanding how it (period poverty) disproportionately affects Black menstruators. It really is what kind of pushed us. Understanding that Period Poverty isn't just like, "Oh, I forgot to get a pad day." It's people who are in poverty, who are using rags and garbage bags to manage their periods and people who just can't afford it, or people who don't have access to clean and running water. It really opened our eyes to the issue of period poverty. Knowing that our state is one of the poorest states if not the poor state and it's also the state with the highest percentage of Black people, highest proportion of Black people. We were really like we need to bring something like this to Mississippi now. Even how we ran that social media campaign and the tools that they gave us, we still use to this day to run 601 social media. A lot of our experiences with the Pad Project helped us to create and build 601 for Period Equity.

PATEL

How was the process like establishing 601 for Period Equity, and co-finding that?

BROWN

Honestly, it began as just a conversation between my sister and I. Asia, as I mentioned, she's exactly four years older than me. I'm a junior in high school, and she's a junior in college, because of the pandemic, we were both sophomore at the time, she had to come home from

Spelman Atlanta. She's very passionate and we always have talks about what we're passionate about, especially in terms of social justice. She herself really wants to become a doula; she's very interested in like reproductive justice. She's a volunteer at abortion clinic, I think my sister is a complete hero, and she's just completely amazing. She came to me with the idea of starting the organization up, and it simply would not exist without her. It's (601 for Period Equity) her completely her brainchild. Sometimes I feel like I'm just along for the ride. It just started as a conversation with her like, "Hey if you don't want to do this with me, it's okay. But I think I really want to create a period equity organization for menstruators here in Mississippi." From there, we just started talking and bouncing ideas off each other. I think the first thing that we did really was set up a Google Form to people to request packages. Within the first week or two, we had request from a school-based programs here in Vicksburg, for 200 packages. And then the rest is history, really. That's really how it started and from there, we created our logo from a guy at Morehouse actually designed it. I hate that I can't think of his name off the top of my head, but he's awesome and amazing. Then we kind of figured out how we're going to run things. We got volunteers, we even had a Black activist, out of Jackson, which is our neighboring city, it's about 45 minutes away, reach out to us. She was like, I want to get this thing started in Jackson. Maisie Brown, there's no correlation, even though we all have the last name Brown. She is also absolutely amazing. The reason she connected with us was because the summer before we had gone to a protest, she has organized in Jackson, Mississippi, concerning George Floyd and the entire Black Lives Matter events of the previous summer of 2020. It was an amazing turnout, and she was simply an amazing organizer. From there, we just continued to grow and have continued to do so. We kind of slowed and took a break in August so that we could all adjust to our new lives, because Asia moved back to Atlanta to start school back again, and now I'm a junior. We've been really readjusting at this time but that was really the process of getting started.

PATEL

That's so amazing. It's amazing to hear about how like all the different people connected and how your older sister came about with this idea and how y'all work together. So you're also involved with the home girl project? Can you tell me a little bit more about the home girl project and your work through the home girl project?

BROWN

Yes. The Homegirl Project is an organization for women of color and non-binary of color. It just really helps to build grassroots and political power through people of color. The reason I saw it because I already followed them, and I thought they were dope organization on Instagram. Then as soon as I saw they opened up application for their fellowship I had to join. At the time I had no idea what type of projects I wanted to do through the fellowship. I ended up wanting to focus on misogynoir which I kind of stated earlier, is the specific oppression Black women face being both Black and women. I did an online course through Canopy Lab, I want to say, it's a European company that allows you to create educational content. That's up on the Homegirl Project Canopy Lab page. Looking back on it, I was like, stressed about it the whole time. Because like I said, we just piled it up, in terms of schoolwork, and extracurricular stuff that I was already doing, and then all the advocacy stuff I committed to. As happy that I am that I

completed it, I really wish I would have been able to try and get out to people. Even though it wasn't as successful to me as I would want it to be, I did get a lot of support for it with praise and the Homegirl Project helped me out every step of the way. I'm very grateful for them. I actually apply to be a writer for their blog [Girl Talk](#)⁵. So that's my capacity as of now. So I'm super happy about that. Super happy to start publishing for them. That's basically nice minutes with the Homegirl Project.

PATEL

Okay, that's amazing. I can't wait for you to start writing as well. So throughout your different projects, you talked a lot about how women of color specifically Black women are impacted by period equity, or period poverty. How do you feel that that isn't highlighted enough in, like the mainstream idea of period poverty? How do you think someone can approach to highlight misogynoir or Black women specifically, or Black menstruators?

BROWN

I think that in general, the entire Period Equity movement, the mainstream one can be very whitewashed. In the past, I don't think that when I heard or saw somebody talking about periods, and menstruation and things like that, they were ever really black. Usually, they were White girls, or White women, or doing it, and it felt very White centered. It didn't seem like a space that I could feel welcomed in. Thankfully, the Pad Project welcomed us with open arms, and were very supportive every step of the way, especially in terms of really stepping back and just giving us the tools we needed, like connecting us with Black period equity activist, who are already doing the work, knew how to guide us. Even just giving us tools and stepping back. I think that a lot of times, we just kind of have it as a vague conversation instead of getting specific. I think that we can say, Black women are disproportionately affected by endometriosis, and Black menstruators are disproportionately affected by period poverty, and trans menstruators are left out in the conversation, and things like that. We need to be, not even necessarily more inclusive, but more inviting of Black leadership, non-binary leadership, and trans leadership in a way that will allow us to represent what menstruators is in a more holistic way.

PATEL

Absolutely. All the different advocacy work that you talked about involves you to a certain degree. So how do like how to how does your experience with different organizations help you understand how to mobilize youth or raise awareness within young people to care about these issues?

BROWN

I think that my involvement in these organizations helped because they were always youth led. Mine is MY (Mississippi Youth) council, it was basically youth led, it was all youth council members, but it kind of was led by Teen Health Mississippi before that, obviously an adult run organization. Seeing people who are young like me, or who started when they were young, like

⁵ [Girl Talk](#)

me, have entire organizations and win awards was helpful in pushing me. I don't have to wait till I'm older to say this, or speak up about this, or organize around this issue because there's not really an age requirement to have your voice heard or speak up about wanting to be free of oppressive system. I think that it helped me because they were around my age. A lot of times use social media to mobilize which most of us are familiar with. That really helps to mobilize people who are around your age, and who are willing my community, my peers, to want to organize around important topics.

PATEL

Absolutely. How do you think social media plays a role? All the organizations that you have worked with, and you talked about how the Pad Project and 601 for Period Equity really mobilized through social media. So how do you think social media plays a role in Youth Activism?

BROWN

I think that social media plays a very central role in Youth Activism because of the fact that we've really never been alive at a time where the internet didn't exist in some capacity. Some of us grew up when it was kind of in not at beginning stages, but kind of just getting off its feet and hit the ground running and everything. I personally can't remember a time when you know, something like Snapchat or Twitter, Instagram didn't exist. Us being comfortable with those forms of social media, interactive app really helps. What you're doing is sharing information you're sharing, you know what, like today was, today, what you did, and how you feel. And activism a lot of times is getting people to understand how you feel about a certain issue and why it's important. I think that social media is central to Youth Activism. Even TikTok, people on TikTok organized around certain issues. People on Twitter were going to organize around certain issues in boost people's go fund me and discuss important topics. I think that Youth Activism kind of really run a lot on social media.

PATEL

Absolutely. So going back to the home girl project and the online course that you talked about. How did you come about the idea of making an online course or can you talk about more what the online course included?

BROWN

I can. Basically, I knew that I wanted to do something educational, because I love to write, obviously, I'm a writer for the Homegirl Project. I do enjoy writing. I like to tell people and teach people things. My mom's a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher. A lot of people in my family were teachers. When I saw the application for the Homegirl Project, I knew that I wanted to apply via the educational track. I knew that I wanted to do something about a topic I was passionate about, and something that was close to my heart. The two topics that I whittled it down to were like prison abolition, because of the serious conditions and needs to be released with them that were going on around the time and are still continuing now because it needs to be reworked for sure. And also, misogynoir, which I said like 5000 times, but just in case, it is the specific oppression that Black women face being both Black and women. It was kind of a

new topic to me prison abolition was I hadn't read up on it, and it's very serious. At the time, I didn't want to tackle it. It was very broad. So instead, I chose what I had personal experience with which was misogynoir. From there, I kind of had to zero in on what I specifically wanted to focus on because when you think about it that's also a very broad topic. I kind of decided to point to misogynoir and history. It's basically a look at Black woman's activism through history and how it's affected by our oppression. How being impacted by misogynoir, both anti-blackness and anti-womaness typically creates a more radical politics in Black woman activist. And how, really looking at that, and examining that will lead us to Black liberation. So that's what the course was about. Unfortunately, for me, my target audience really was my peers. But unfortunately, for me, I think that I just didn't really keep that in mind. And so, to me, the course is more like a college course than something that you can share with friends and family. In the future, hopefully, I could create some type of content that would maybe make it more understandable and accessible to other people in the future. I would love to do that. But that is basically the overview of my course.

PATEL

Okay, so as you said your target audience, were your peers. Personally, not identifying as a Black person I am not educated about the struggles of Black woman or Black people in general. How do you think this course or like, the things that you talk about in the course can be used to educate people who are unaware of issues faced by Black Women?

BROWN

I think that making it more casual, but more kind of interactive would have helped. Quite honestly, instead of a course I could have done like YouTube videos, or Instagram Live, or, like infographics on Instagram or something like that, as like a social media campaign and I think that would've been applicable to my target audience, because I would have been able to put it in a format that was more understandable and less extra work. In terms of like, people were already burned out because it was during a pandemic and people were exhausted with online school. I think it would have come off like more online schoolwork, than as liberation educational experience.

PATEL

So, from all the different projects you've worked on, which project would you say had the most significant impact on you?

BROWN

I think that the Pad Project, or 601 for Period Equity, obviously, but that probably had the most significant impact on me. In terms of growing as an organizer, because in my other capacities, I was more of in terms of the Mississippi Youth Council, a political advocate, but as a co-founder of 601 for Period Equity I am a grassroots community organizer. That's what I've always wanted to be always the place I wanted to get to. I just didn't know what I wanted to organize around what I was passionate about, and like how to get there. I think this was most impacted me.

PATEL

Okay, so while doing the work that you do, or like the different advocacy work, have you faced any pushback, whether it's from your family, community or other people in general?

BROWN

In terms of 601, the only time I've ever had pushback was media exposure. I think we posted we got a WLTB article done by an amazing Black woman journalist. It was posted to Facebook from the WLBT website. Obviously, there was like, racist White people who are trolling in the comments, but I don't even consider that pushback. I just think that comes with the territory of being a Black woman. The only real pushback, I think, was in terms of being like a political advocate for Mississippi Youth Council because conservative White men are very, very, very opposed to like comprehensive sex education. Why? No idea. I think it's just the fact that we live in the Bible Belt. And so, people don't want their children, or really, they're teenagers, and young adults, to know what that means, even though they already do and be educated about how to be safe with it.

PATEL

I can't imagine having to work through that and that kind of pushback. You mentioned like growing up in the South and growing up in Mississippi, specifically, how has that impacted your understanding of advocacy, and just the different advocacy projects and activism?

BROWN

I think that surprisingly, I think that people think that just because you're from Mississippi, you experienced racism more frequently, or like it's harsher and it's really not true to because to me, America is Mississippi. It's not necessarily the people that you interact with. It's really, how you are seen. Sometimes I think that people who are from outside the state won't take me as seriously because I say I'm from Mississippi, because we're Black in just about everything. I think there's a lot of anti-black disdain for the South, especially like I said, Mississippi being a very large proportion of Black. There's a stigma of us being uneducated, and dumb and ignorant and it's just simply not true. I think, also a lot of times, activists from the South are a lot of times unsupported and devalued. Especially if you're black. Being from Mississippi only made me want to go harder in my work and want to go harder for my community.

PATEL

Absolutely. So where do you see your activism headed in the future?

BROWN

Well, I hope that we're able to keep 601 for Period Equity running, even if I choose to go out of state for college, which I mentioned Asia goes to Spelman College, in Atlanta, which is also my dream school. So hopefully, I'll be heading there for the fall of 2023. I would like to major in sociology and educate myself more, because as educators' daughter, I have to be the first person say, learning never stops, you should be a lifetime learner. I want to learn as much as I can about all systems of oppression. I love history as well, so I would like to major in sociology,

and then become a lawyer, hopefully a human rights lawyer. I would love to involve myself in some legal work surrounding abortion access. Also, obviously, period poverty, abolishing the tampon tax, which is the luxury sales tax placed on period products. Which is absolutely ridiculous, because they're a necessity, not a luxury. I would like to actually involve myself and some prison advocacy work, because as I mentioned, Mississippi has a absolutely horrible prison system. And that's one of the topics that I'm also very passionate about besides reproductive justice.

PATEL

I'm very excited to see where you're headed in the future. But that so what advice would you give to a youth who wants to get involved in activism?

BROWN

I think that the first thing I would say is, make sure that you educate yourself, which I know people say that a lot. But when I say that, I mean, be open minded, go into it with an open mind and be accepting other people. Usually, the people who are doing the most advocacy and activism work are people who are marginalized the most, because it's so vital to them. You want to go into these spaces with respect for people who are already doing the work and respectful people who are directly impacted by the work and make sure that you kind of assess the need. Like if there's already an organization doing the work that you want to see, consider joining them first before making your own unless you have, you know, some serious issues with the things that they are doing, or you want to create your own thing. So that would be my advice.

PATEL

Okay. Thank you so much for this interview and for taking the time to talk to me. Is there anything else you'd like to say or add?

BROWN

I think I've covered a lot at loved your questions. I love answering them and I love having this conversation with you. And I appreciate the opportunity because I think that is really cool that years from now, you know people down the line and my family will be able to read my words and hear directly from me I really appreciate you for kind of immortalizing my work like that's actually amazing.

PATEL

Thank you so much for your time and your work