

PROFESSIONAL TROUBLEMAKER



with LUVVIE AJAYI JONES

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Push Forward (with Latham Thomas) - Episode 23

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Welcome to the Professional Troublemaker Podcast! This is the place where we help you cultivate the courage, authenticity and audacity you need to use your voice, take up space and live a life that is so bold, even your wildest dreams say #goals. I'm your host, Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, sought after speaker and side-eye sorceress bringing you thought-provoking conversations with amazing people taken action, done scary things and rocked the boat to an audacious life. Like the late, great John Lewis said, these are the kind of people who are "Never, ever afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Before we jump into today's interview, know that this podcast is named after my second New York Times bestselling book, Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual, which is available now wherever you get your books!

With this book and with everything I do, and I'm on a mission to help a million people live audaciously. To do that, they must fight their fear.

Think of it! A million people who are out there, standing on the edge of something great and need that little push of encouragement. That push to be the domino. To say the hard thing. To have the hard conversation. A million people kicking their fear to the curb and step into the life they've been dreaming of. A million people asking for a raise. A million people starting a fierce job they're not sure they're ready for. A million people doing something so big that their wildest dreams say goals. My goodness.

And that is what writing this book has done for me, what it's already done for those who are reading it and gifting it to others. This book has empowered people to say yes to things they were previously saying no to. It's empowered people to have tough conversations they weren't going to have before. People have asked for raises and promotions and gotten them after reading this book and finding the courage to speak up. The domino effect of what has been happening when a few people have decided not to live in the realm of fear has been amazing - think of what could happen if a million people stopped letting fear be the first factor in their decision making?

An audacious mission like that can't happen without you, so let's get this book in the hands of people who need it. Buy a copy of Professional Troublemaker for yourself, or as a gift for your friend who needs a push. I know it will change your life like it's changed mine and I know it will change the lives of all these people who touch it, because domino effects are real. Order Professional Troublemaker

(hardcover or audiobook) now at PROFESSIONALTROUBLEMAKERBOOK.com or wherever you buy books.

My guest today is Latham Thomas - wellness maven to the stars, birth doula, queen regent of radical self-care and Mother to mothers (and birthing people) during one of the most sacred times of their lives - She helps usher in new life into this dimension. That is Latham's purpose.

Latham has literally written the books on how to be fabulous while pregnant and actualize your glow as a modern woman and mother. Her passion centers Black women and birthing people as she works to democratize doula services and maternal support by spotlighting the global crisis that is Black maternal health.

In this episode, I learn that Black women and birthing people are 3-4 times more likely to die during childbirth or due to childbirth related causes than their white counterparts. Those numbers skyrocket to 12 times in New York City and 5 times in the UK.

Latham sounds the alarm and reminds us of the role that access, education, racial bias and the historic gaze on Black women's bodies play in this statistic as a whole. We also get into birth as a transformative experience, and how her ancestors LITERALLY showed up on behalf of her the birth of her son. We talk about her story, how she became this person. This is an encore interview that I wanted to bring back to you all to listen to, especially to people who are new to listen to this podcast because Latham's word and Latham's story and her journey are so inspiring.

Even if you aren't a mother, this episode will serve as a reminder of the importance of fearlessly pursuing your why and being intentional about loaning courage to those around you when they're most vulnerable.

Let's get into it.

Conversation with Latham Thomas

LUVVIE Latham! Thank you so much for coming on the show!

LATHAM Hey, babe. Thank you for having me.

LUVVIE Oh, my gosh. I love everything that you do and what you stand for. So I always start by asking my guests, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

LATHAM So when I was little, actually my mom, my aunt, and my great-aunt were all pregnant at the same time and so I was four years old and my dramatic play with my cousin who was maybe nine months older than me, was that we would put Cabbage Patch dolls under our shirt and then we could deliver each other's babies, so I thought that I think that for a sliver of my life I was like, oh, maybe I'll just deliver babies but then, as I grew up I thought I would be in the sciences, but I came back to the baby thing, so I think that, that was what it was. It stuck.

LUVVIE So you were four and you were like, I want to actually just be the person that's bringing kids to this world.

LATHAM Yes, because you know when you're four years old you're only at the height of people's bellies anyway, right? I was constantly bumping into my mom's belly and so, yeah. I think like that was such a fascinating time in my life and my mom taught me a lot about the anatomy and I was so excited and so every chance that I got, I would talk to people about it and so she reminded me. She was like, "You know, when you would walk up to people and they would say, 'oh, your sister's in your mother's belly,' you would correct them and say, 'no, my sister's in my mother's uterus and she's going to come out of her vagina,'" so I was very into it.

LUVVIE Stop it. At four?

LATHAM Yes, at four.

LUVVIE How did that go off in school? Were you the kid who were correcting other kids and giving them anatomy lessons?

LATHAM You know, I did do anatomy lessons but that didn't go over too well because you're supposed to use different words in school, but yeah. I always I think was into the sciences. I was always into anatomy at a really early age. I think my mom definitely blessed me with that when she gave me those books and sort of educated me as a young 'un.

LUVVIE Do you remember what books she gave you?

LATHAM You know what? They were like these little picture books and there was a show called My Mom's having a Baby. It was a cartoon and they had like a little jingle. I loved the show and it kind of prepared me for being a big sister. By the way, I wasn't a great big sister. When my sister arrived, I was like, send her back, I was just kidding, I don't like this. But I got used to her after a few weeks but I think the entire process leading up to was really fascinating for me.

LUVVIE How so?

LATHAM It was just more like the magic of it, the mystery of the body, the fact that her belly was constantly growing. Even when I would touch it and she would say, "Oh, the baby's moving now," and then I would be able to feel my sister kicking, like that was really just like incredible. And so, that imprinted me. I still remember those moments and that was like 30 something years ago.

LUVVIE So this followed you all through high school and you kept on with this dream. When you got to college, what did you major in?

LATHAM When I got to college I majored in visual arts and environmental science and so I really love the sciences. I'm really into evidence-based research. I love that, but I also love the ethereal and I also love the arts. And so, I did... actually it's so crazy. I just, this weekend, framed a woodblock print that I made like 20 years ago in college and I'm like, why did this not get framed before? I

don't know and I don't know how I traveled with it all these years and it didn't get ruined, but yeah.

So I majored in visual arts and in the labs we would have... if you think about science labs, it's really quiet and you have to be really exact and you have to go in and you can't really make it a party, and so that part of my life I got fulfilled when I would go to the art studio and when I would go there, we would be playing like Slum Village and Jay-Z or whatever and then our friends would be in there and we would all be doing our art projects really late at night and it was more of a turn up. So I kind of got my balance of quiet and turn ups in college.

LUVVIE So you graduated with what degree?

LATHAM With a dual degree in visual arts and environment science from Columbia University.

LUVVIE Yo, you were actually really focused. You were one of the people who went into college and graduated with the major that they started with.

LATHAM I did. I did. I think I was surrounded also by people who were so focused. It was like kids in our school who were already working, who already had jobs, and I was like, dude, you're working and going to school? I had my little jobs at school. You know how you get a university campus job, I had stuff like that, but there were kids who were working in institutions, like working at JP Morgan and graduating early so I felt like late, you know what I mean? The fact that I graduated on time.

But yeah, there was just a level of Black excellence because when I look at all the people I was in school with, all of them are doing such amazing things and there was a level of focus and commitment and you know, coming from the family that we come from, there's just an expectation that you perform and that you achieve because some of us are the first to enter these institutions or the first to graduate college or just like paving a way for the kids who will come after us from our neighborhoods and communities. So it was like I didn't have the... I had that pressure and I also went to boarding school before that, in Colorado, so I just had that added pressure to succeed.

LUVVIE So you... were you from Colorado?

LATHAM Girl, no. I'm from Oakland.

LUVVIE Yeah. So tell me, how did you end up in boarding school in Colorado?

LATHAM Okay, because my mother is a wizard. She was like, look. She recognized very early, something that I think that is a big topic of discussion these days around these white faces we're missing and she talked about these boys clubs that were formed in the formative years of the lives of white men, like they would go into these institutions and they become friends with people who they end up basically transforming the world with, for better or for worse, and so they all hire each other. They all work together. They loan each other money, they do all these things together but their relationships started when they go to these boarding schools, these elite boarding schools, and when they go to university together.

And so, she was like, you need to be in those settings. And so, you need to be around these people who have access and wealth and you need to be exposed to that and you need to also claim that for yourself and so she made me apply for this merit scholarship to attend this school and I was like, Mom it's in Colorado. Why would I do that? Because I wanted to go to school with all my friends, locally, and she was like, no. We're going to do this. You're going to apply because this is a great opportunity and lo and behold, I received a merit scholarship. And so, that meant that for four years, all of my tuition was covered for boarding school and all we had to pay for was my books and my flights home, so my mom was like, you're going.

LUVVIE So how was boarding school?

LATHAM It was actually really cool. There was a bunch of people from my hometown who were there so I did have like a lot of kind of older brothers from Oakland. It was very... I mean, I was probably... there were definitely under 10 Black people in the entire school and that was interesting because I came from... you know, Oakland is just Black, it's like Blackety-Black. So it was like really it was a shift but it was also one where I kind of was primed for the experiences I would have later in life. I would be able to be very comfortable in the corporate settings that I have to flow through in these other kind of elite spaces. I was just prepared for that.

And then, also for college because the workload, you're really prepared, being in that college preparatory setting in a boarding school, you just learn how to be really responsible and your parents aren't there so you're doing everything yourself like starting at fourteen and the things that I would do like my chores at home it was like I had to do these things and then some, to look after myself in boarding school.

LUVVIE All right. So boarding school essentially forced you to grow up in a way where you had to become responsible for yourself.

LATHAM Yeah. I had to become really responsible really early on and I was also the eldest and you know birth order is so important, like the eldest child is always the... like assumes responsibility, assumes all... It's like if something happens in the house it's my fault, right? Even if I'm not there. It's like my sister, I'm like, yo, she's in the house, actually. She had to have done it. But yeah. So I think that, that was really part of developing that drive that I had and also I think just having a mother who was an Aries and doesn't take no for an answer also like really instilled in me this dedication to push forward.

LUVVIE All right. So you graduated from college, got your visual arts and environmental science degree. What was next for you?

LATHAM So what was next... at the time I was working with the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment and the Audubon Center, just writing curriculum in science for early childhood education and I was doing that with the New York City Board of Education as well and then I met my son's father and he also was at Columbia, but years before me, and so we had some different circles kind of started to encircle each other, communities started to encircle each other and we ended up meeting and it didn't take us long before we ended up pregnant with my son and so I was still young. I was like 23 and I wasn't planning to have a child then but it was

definitely wanted, I wanted my son, but I was totally like, okay, I'm still a kid. I still need my mom's help, you know? And again, I was catapulted into adulthood by becoming a mother at 23.

And so, I had my son in New York City. I was pregnant during the time where most people would want to go home, but I was really determined to live here and to be in New York and so I stayed in New York. I delivered him in this birth center which is like on 14th Street. It's since closed but it's right next door to this very popular nightclub called The Darby or Up and Down, so my son was always thinking he was born in a nightclub.

And then, this, which I guess matches the fact that he's a deejay now but the amazing thing about it though was that it was a free standing birth center and I went there to deliver my baby. Six hours later I was walking home and there was just...

LUVVIE What?

LATHAM Yes. And it was amazing because it was like midwives and there were nurses. They had doulas as part of the experience. I didn't have a doula because I had so much education that attending this place for your birth, you had to do 21 hours of education to deliver there, so I felt and I was just fresh out of school so you know I was very studious about the whole process. And that became the solidifying factor for me like my son's birth being so incredible, having been visited by my ancestors right at the time of transition into delivery...

LUVVIE Tell me about that. I want to know more about that.

LATHAM Oh, my god. It was beautiful. It was like... so my water broke at 12:30 AM and after walking around for like I don't know, six, seven hours, all day, because walking really helps the baby settle into the pelvis. So he was already a week late and it was a full moon so I was like, okay. This is a really good time to try to get this baby to come. Full moon, a lot of babies are born in the full moon because of the pressure in the air, and so you'll find that a lot of places are full when it's a full moon, with women going into labor.

So I was hoping to align with that energy and I got home and I'd been walking all day and I was like, this is unfair, I'm tired. This baby needs to hurry up and come. We wanted to go on vacation and so we were like, you know what? You're in punishment when you get here because we supposed to be already gone.

And so, anyway, I'm sitting in the bed and I said to myself, I just said, I'm just going to pray and then I said, "God, you know, I just would love a sign because I just don't why this baby is still inside. At this point I'm ready. I would really love to meet him." And 20 minutes later, when I was listening to Mahalia Jackson, 20 minutes later, my water broke and my son's father was like, "Um, you're peeing in the bed." I'm like, "No, I'm not peeing in the bed." He's said, "Get out the bed." So I got out and I stood up and it was like, if you ever saw Sex in the City where Miranda, when her water broke, it was like that. It was like a gush onto the floor. I'm like, "Oh, my god. It's on TV."

So then, at that point we're like excited so we were calling people like promoters, like yo, it's going down. The baby's coming. So we're calling all our family. I'm not tired at all. I'm so wired

because I know the baby's coming soon and I call the midwives and they're like, you need to go to sleep because it's going to be work later. And I was like, girl, I'm not tired. I stayed up, of course, and watched jazz documentaries until like six in the morning and then finally I started feeling something around 6:30 in the morning. I go take a shower. I'm just kind of pacing, doing my thing and then I start to wake people up in the house because I was like okay, it's getting intense. Around 8:00 AM it was getting intense, 9:00, I think we left.

Okay, so we're in the taxi and I'm like it's seven blocks you guys, it's not that crazy, let's just get there. And we get there and the midwives just watch very calmly for this 10 minute period as I enter into the room and then, while I'm in there, I would say, probably close to 1:00, my son was born at 1:09, at that time I felt this, right before I was going to push, Luvvie, I felt this ring in the shape of a horseshoe and it was surrounding me but from above. If you could imagine like when somebody's staring at you so hard that you're like, yo, I'm about to ignite. Who is looking at me, right?

LUVVIE Yeah.

LATHAM I felt this heat and I look up and I see this halo of ancestors and this is before Black Panther but they had their... they were cloaked in these robes and then they had their arms across them like Wakanda-style. It was crazy. This was way before, by the way. This is like decades before.

LUVVIE Wow.

LATHAM My son's 15. And they were looking down at me and I said, "I want to go up there," and I pointed and everybody in the room saw that and I felt myself ascend out of my body and I was watching the whole process unfold.

LUVVIE Whoa.

LATHAM It was crazy. It was a psychic thing. It was this primal experience and it was like when people say they go to Central or South America to do peyote or ayahuasca or do this journey medicine with shamans, like we have access to that in birth, right? I've never done drugs but I was able to access those same chemicals, right? And have a similar sort of transformative experience.

So my son was born then like a few minutes later and it was magical and I was like okay, I have to protect this for women. It was clear to me that this was like nobody talks about this. They talk about how painful, they talk about messy and all these things, but they never talk about this spiritual experience that I felt. And so, I wanted to make sure I could help other women with that.

LUVVIE That's amazing. So do you even remember pain in childbirth or was it just a pure spiritual, beautiful experience for you?

LATHAM No, I remember the pain. People say that you don't remember it. Like I can't locate it physically in my body, like you can't. There's these incredible endorphins that make it so that you don't recall the pain but you do remember being in pain, and I do remember that I was like, okay, to everybody in the room, "I just want to remind everybody that if I say I want to do this again any

time soon just tell me not to, right?" So I said, "Before I forget what this feels like, just tell me, don't do this again soon." But once he was born, of course, like 20 minutes later, I was like I would love to do this again. You forget. You really, truly forget. But yes, I do remember that it was intense. It was not like a walk in the park.

LUVVIE So what did you name him?

LATHAM I named him Fulano and that came through a dream. His dad had dreamt of the Fulani people from North Africa and their travels and how they were kind of like outcasts but nomadic and so he was like, I think that's his name. And so we woke up that day, we were like, that's his name. And so, when he was born we were like, yep, he looks like that. Let's keep that name.

LUVVIE He actually does look like he could possibly be Fulani. So his birth really launched this next phase into your mission to become a wellness maven and maternity guru and just the person who helps people experience this better than they were before. Tell me more, like what did you do next once you had Fulano. How did that spur you into essentially what became [Mama Glow](#)?

LATHAM Yeah. So Fulano always takes credit. He's like, by the way, I'm the reason we have [Mama Glow](#). He tells people that. It's true. So what happened after was like during the times that he would be sleeping and napping as he got a little bit older, was when I would focus on my dreams. When he was dreaming, I would be dreaming, but I would be like really mapping out business and what it could become and I knew that women needed some handholding and I knew that the process in New York City was super-hard to navigate and it shouldn't have been and this is a time when people weren't using the internet. We use the internet and our phones for everything and it's so easy, but back then people were not doing that. They were going to the telephone book which is like a relic now. They were going, asking people for referrals and it was just like word of mouth.

So people didn't trust the internet then so it was really harder so I had to get all of my resources sort of by hand, and by trial and error, and then that kind of became the rudiments of the first book that I wrote through all of my sort of exercises, all the things that I learned, the diet that I followed, all the things that I did, yoga and lifestyle wise, had put in to the first book [Mama Glow](#) and while I was writing that book or finishing that book, I had this idea to do a film festival that would focus around birth.

And so, we launched that with Christy Turlington Burns who has [Every Mother Counts](#) as an organization for maternal health, and then we also had Selita Ebanks who was doing a lot of work with Sierra Leone at the time around the maternal crisis there. We had this amazing festival in the Hamptons. We looked at all these films from around the world and that was like kind of like the opening, it was like, whoa. There's a lot that we can do here. People want this information. It's outside of just this idea of hosting one event, right?

Then I went on to do another event like that with Ricki Lake and Abby Epstein for the [Business of Being Born](#) and that was like 250 people showed up for that and we were like, wait a minute. People really want to know this information. So then I launched a website that would become [Mama Glow](#) and it had information, resources, and then I also launched the doula aspect of

that. I was still doing it kind of on the low. You know what I mean? Like not as seriously, but then I launched it into the website...

LUVVIE All right. So once you had Fulano, how did you get trained to become an actual doula?

LATHAM Yes. So I... this is a really great story, actually. I had gone to this ashram to celebrate my birthday, but also to teach. It was like a health related weekend and I was speaking and leading some workshops at this ashram. When I got there it was actually my birthday and so they did this ceremony, this like puja where they do a blessing and prayer over you and kind of it's like a kick-off ritual and after that, there was this little Vedic astrologer and he was like, "I need to do your reading," and I was like, okay, cool.

So he takes me into this little hut and I'm like, okay. I'm a little nervous because I could feel the walls with all of this entire space was like this small hut and I could feel all four walls, just by reaching in front of me and I was getting claustrophobic but I sat there anyway and just breathed through it and he started sharing information with me. It was mostly kind of gibberish. I couldn't understand most but then there were certain moments where he was totally clear. And one of the things he said with total clarity was, "You're supposed to mother the mother," and I was like, wow. Okay. I get that, but I'm already doing that. He was like, "No. In a deeper way, you're supposed to mother the mother." So he gave me some numbers, which I wrote down, and he said, "These are going to be really significant numbers in your life," and so just look out for them. Somebody says that to you, you're looking everywhere for signs, right?

LUVVIE Right.

LATHAM So everywhere I look I'm like, okay. There's like eight of these. Does that mean something? And so, that lasted probably until I got home and then once I got home I got back into my groove. And what ended up happening was, on a few days later after I got settled in, I got an email and you know how, back in the day, I don't know if you recall this, but way back in the day we didn't check our emails every day. It was like an event to check your email. You would be like, oh, I think I'm going to open my computer and check my electronic mail, right?

So I did that which was like a once a week thing or whatever and I opened it up and there was some email there and it wasn't a lot like today and there was a message and it said, "You've been accepted to this doula fellowship program." Mind you, Luvvie, I don't remember applying, okay? So I think that part of me just filled out this thing. I don't remember even filling out the application but I was accepted to this program and then I looked at the dates and the date was aligned with one of the dates that he gave me, like one of my star dates, so like okay.

And so, I just took it from God like I understand, I'll be obedient, I'll follow the call. I'm a Taurus. We're super-stubborn. People for years were asking me to serve in this way and I just was kind of like not ready. And so, in this moment, I decided. I was like, okay cool. I'm going to do this program, I'm going to accept the fellowship and I'm going to commit to this work.

LUVVIE Wow. This is nuts. You essentially got something dropped in your lap that ended up changing your whole life.

LATHAM My whole life, yeah. My whole life.

LUVVIE And what was the biggest lesson from that doula fellowship?

LATHAM I think the biggest lesson from that was really like it was... Well, I found my first partner, my first birth partner who I did work with we would do tandem births together and I think the biggest lesson was in trusting myself that this was supposed to happen like I was supposed to be doing this work and I did continue. It became like it was almost instantaneous, because I was already teaching these prenatal yoga classes and there was all this other stuff going on. I had nutrition clients that were pregnant so I had a steady stream of people off the bat. I had to take four births a month, off the bat, which was crazy, by the way. I think most people do one birth a month. I was doing four.

And so, I think that was the biggest piece of trusting and the listening. So often I think we get signals constantly through our body. Our body sends us very clear signals about when we're aligned with something. We get universal signals. We get signals through people who show up through our lives with special medicine to remind us of what we're supposed to be doing on our paths. And sometimes we just don't listen. And so, for me it was about listening and not being stubborn, like knowing that a calling is different from a passion and I think that we often conflate the two.

People will think, oh, I'm passionate about this thing. But passion makes you excited about something but a calling is like getting up in the middle of the night, at three in the morning and waking up to go serve someone who's in labor. I'm not passionate about that, I'm called to do that. You know what I mean? A calling is when someone is 30 hours in labor and you have been there the whole time and you're just helping them move through and you're also completely depleted at this point. And then, the next two weeks later you have another birth. That's a calling. It's not really like a passion and I think that part of what a lot of us haven't realized that are pursuing the work that we do, our life's work, is sometimes we come to it through passion like something that we're excited about, but the actual commitment and the sustained commitment is because you're called to do so. There's definitely days that I do not want to get up in the morning or that I feel like I would rather do something else but I've been called to do it and so I'm obedient to that call.

Imagine being in an online space where people's foolishness doesn't make you want to fight the air. That might sound impossible with your current choices for social media, but I was sick of wading through nonsense to find like-minded people, so I created my own online community. And if you are the kind of person who is striving to be a professional troublemaker and fight fear, we need you to join us in that community, because you need people to cheer you on.

LuvvNation is my online community and app that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world. It's the place for the most thoughtful, funny, most chill deficient people on these interwebs. We're a community that comes together to make each other better with curated conversations, opportunities to connect, and challenges to help us transform and do better in every area of our lives. So, I want you to come in

there, join us. Become a citizen of LuvvNation. So go to luvvnation.com, that's luvvnation.com L-U-V-V-N-A-T-I-O-N. Download the app in the App Store or on Android, it's on iOS and Android and come on through! All right. Back to the podcast.

LUVVIE So explain to people what a doula is. What is your duty as a doula?

LATHAM Yes. So a doula provides educational support, advocacy, physical support, emotional support, and education, really to help a laboring mother or couple prepare themselves for the process. We usually work with people when they're in, I would say, a lot of people contract by like 20-25 weeks pregnancy and then they start to work with a practitioner, a doula, to support them educationally and prepare them for the process of labor and birth and then we support in the early post-partum period as well, making sure that breastfeeding is established if moms are deciding to breastfeed and to make sure that they're healthy and that the outcome went smoothly.

And then, we also sort of track for mental health and perinatal mood disorders because those things can happen along the birth continuum just because of how our society is set up, a lot of women don't have support. A lot of women have to go back to work 10 days after birth in this country. So we're there to kind of help fill some of the policy gaps that occur as a result of our modern living, that is anti-woman, so we really show up to help support women so they feel really fulfilled and that they can have an extra set of hands and someone who is knowledgeable about what they're experiencing while they go through it.

LUVVIE So while a woman is in childbirth, her doula is her advocate, the person who's telling the doctor, "No, this is what she wants. No, this is what she doesn't want. Here's what she needs."

LATHAM Exactly.

LUVVIE Why are doulas now a matter of life and death, especially for Black women?

LATHAM Yeah. So it's really interesting that in the past I would say two years, there's been a spotlight on Black maternal health. There has been a 25 year increase in the maternal mortality as it relates to Black women and it's gotten to a critical mass and so the CDC has declared a state of emergency for Black women in that we are three to four times more likely than white women to die during childbirth or due to childbirth related causes. That number jumps 12 times in New York City.

LUVVIE Oh, my gosh.

LATHAM Yeah. That number is five times in the UK. So we know that this is not just a US phenomenon, this is a global phenomenon. But this is happening here and in places where you would think there is so much access and so much resource, why are Black women dying? We know that it's not... economics aren't protecting us, education isn't protecting us, whereas with white women, these are protected factors. Having a high school education and having economic stability,

having a partnered relationship, all of these things actually improve the birth outcomes for white women, but when it comes to Black women, none of these things factor. We can have Black women who are uber-successful and wealthy, like Serena Williams, have her life in danger, and you could have women who are economically challenged or have like not a lot of economic mobility and they have the same outcome, potentially.

And so that doesn't make sense but we know is that it's because of racial bias, we know that there's been a longstanding gaze on Black women's bodies as stronger and that we don't feel pain and that these are from medical journals from the 17 and 1800s. These are beliefs that have been embedded in the medical system for hundreds of years and we've been treated in this way, that we could be dismissed.

And so, when a woman asks for pain medication for instance, she might wait for hours versus her white counterpart who will get it immediately. Or we'll see, for instance, a woman who will, in surgery, some of her internal, she might get a laceration internally that might go completely unnoticed. A lot of things happen but a lot of Black women are dying, not when they leave the hospital, inside a hospital, and sometimes when they go home, as a result of some of the surgical outcomes, infection, all kinds of things.

But mainly, what the doula's job is, really, in this instance, is to be on the front lines, to really be able to look for and help the doctors in this sense, be able to track markers that might put a woman at risk. So if a woman is at risk for high blood pressure for instance, which is called preeclampsia in pregnancy, this can lead to seizures and it can lead to death so it's something that we'd like to get ahold of early on and, if we see that a mom has high blood pressure, the only cure is to deliver the baby. So lots of times women are super stressed. They are dealing with all kinds of pressures and so we'll see a lot of moms fall into that window of being preeclamptic.

What also happens is that we see physical markers of this. You'll see fuller face, hands that are swollen, feet that are swollen. If you're going to the doctor not that frequently, they might not see these things but your doula will. And so, the doula can say, okay, let's test your urine, let's do all these diagnostic tests with the doctor and be able to confirm something and course correct. So it's our job to kind of help fill in these gaps because, if the patients aren't really clear that somethings wrong and doctors aren't really paying attention, or they can't pay attention because they're overworked or they're just like not, they don't have the bedside manner or the care for these women, then we have to fill those gaps, right?

And not to say that all the weight falls on a doula and that this is really their job is to protect women from dying. We can't do that by ourselves, but I would say that it's a critically important role in this stage that we're in, in the maternal health crisis, because we know that Black women are the ones that are dying. We see the numbers are staggering, right? And so, if we can get it right for Black women, everybody's health improves. So I like us to focus on us.

And so, when I say that I'm thinking about like the Disability Act. When they wanted to put curb cuts in sidewalks, people were like, oh, why would we do that? It's going to destroy the infrastructure, but guess what? They ended up putting curb cuts in sidewalks so when you get to the corner, if you're in a wheelchair, you can dip down and then cross the street and get to the other side. That's a life decision if you're disabled. But guess who benefits now?

LUVVIE Everybody.

LATHAM Women who have strollers. Women who are pushing their... older women pushing their groceries in the little carts. Kids on their little tricycles and bicycles. Everybody benefits because we were working to meet the needs of the marginalized. And so, if we think about this crisis in the same way, it's not a Black woman's issue. It's a human rights issue and if we look at it like, okay, we need to get this right for Black women, everybody will benefit.

So that's really what I believe the role of the doula is now, is to make sure that they're prepared to navigate the waters and serve the unique needs of Black women specifically so that they can make sure that not only they survive the birth but they thrive afterwards, and that that process is protected and that they understand what informed consent looks like. They understand what their rights are. They understand how to advocate for themselves and with people in the room to even advocate because we see a lot of layers of bias play out, and racism. We see where Black fathers don't feel safe in being able to speak up for their partners because of being called, with the security being called on them.

LUVVIE Oh, wow.

LATHAM Yeah. So people don't realize that this is so layered and separation is really something that happens and we see this happening in our government. This happens in the birth space, where a mother will be separated from the people who love her, so that she's in a situation where she's dominated or she's coerced. But you can't make an informed decision and you can't really consent if you don't have all the information and what happens is that our women won't get the information that they need to make a decision. It'll be forced upon them, so more likely they're being coerced or they're cooperating, but they're not consenting, right?

And so, we need to have these conversations about consent and Me Too in spaces like the hospital too because we see a lot of birth trauma happen where women are re-traumatized, who have had sexual or domestic abuse, all types of things that have happened that can be re-triggered in these settings because of how they're dominant, and how they're white male-centric. And so, there's this supremacy that thrives in the medical system and people don't want to acknowledge that and so we need to find protective factors for Black women specifically because we know that they used to experiment on our bodies like we have reason for not trusting the system, ancestrally.

LUVVIE So you've been doula for like Asahd Khaled. I remember when he was being born, DJ Khaled was on SnapChat and you were in the room.

LATHAM Yes.

LUVVIE And you've been doula for Alicia Keys. For a regular woman, for people who are not celebrities, for the people who are not wealthy, how do they have access to doulas and doula services?

LATHAM So doulas should be accessible for all people and I'm looking and our work is really to democratize it and so we have doulas at every single financial bracket. Wherever you are and whatever you can pay, we can offer you a doula to support you. So, to us, that's critically

important to make sure that the people that need it most have access and the people who can afford it, we can do a sliding scale so that those who can afford, it makes up for those who can't. So, to me, it's critically important to make sure that we serve everyone so that all women can have the experience that it seems like very few have access to.

And to me, when I see someone like Khaled, for instance, it was beautiful for him to share that experience through social media, because a lot of people experience natural birth for the first time just watching that video. That's their entry point to what birth could be.

And so, I love when we have those opportunities to shift culture and to bring a conversation forth about birth in a positive light but I also want to make sure that people who are on the fringes and people who are underserved get the services they need and not like a diminished form of the service. They can get the exact same service, because everybody... it's so important how you're born and everybody deserves to feel honored in their birth. Every woman deserves to feel transformed and deserves to feel safety and empowered through that process. And what's happening is that we're doing the opposite to women. In our current medical model, we're not really thinking about the fact that when women come on the other side of this process, that they're traumatized, right?

LUVVIE Yeah, right.

LATHAM We need to... then they're expected to, by the way, breastfeed and do everything correctly and then go home and cook and clean and then go back to work. They're expected to do so much but they're not even supported in this transition, which is a holy transition. Every culture in the world looks at birth in this way of reverence. And then here, we look at it like, what's your number on your bracelet? Like you're a stat or you're just another person that's in here on the conveyor belt.

We cannot look at these life events in this way. We have to intervene in the doula movement. Really it's about reclaiming our bodies as sacred. It's about reclaiming this process as holy and protecting it, protecting the sanctity of these women so that they can actually unfold their superpowers when they go through this because you've seen other women where, when they come out on the other side of birth, they feel really powerful, right?

LUVVIE Yeah.

LATHAM That's a birthright of every single woman. I want every woman to feel that and in addition to just making sure that everyone is healthy on the other side, we want to make sure also that everybody feels empowered, like this is because you know birth is connected to everything else. If you don't feel powerful when you come on the other side of birth it's really also hard to ask for a raise. It's hard to ask for the things that you want. It's hard to speak up for yourself when you felt like you couldn't speak up for yourself in a pivotal transition like birth.

So we have to start to get this right and we do have to make it accessible to all people which is part of why we structure our doula immersion program the way that we do and our doula services so that everybody can have someone. It's really important that everybody can have someone.

LUVVIE Ah. And that's what [Mama Glow](#) does.

LATHAM Yes.

LUVVIE How do people find out more about [Mama Glow](#) because you've been running your doula services now out of in Brooklyn.

LATHAM Yes. Exactly. So we have this space in Brooklyn where we have a lot of programs that are like centered in self-care and community and education but we also have our doula immersion program which runs there. It's pretty much monthly and people can come. We have people from around the world who come. We have all six continents represented. We need somebody from Antarctica. I don't know if anybody really lives there but we need somebody from Antarctica, we can say we have all continents, the world is represented. We have every corner of the United States represented. Everybody comes from everywhere. And so, we also do it in LA and we're coming up in Paris in April with a training too, so it's you can just join in wherever and everyone's welcome. You don't have to have previous experience. The criteria is an open heart and a willingness to serve.

LUVVIE Open heart and willingness to serve, which is kind your life motto because you are constantly serving others and just inspiring people to live better.

LATHAM But that's what you do too, Luvvie. That's what we do.

LUVVIE Oh, thank you. Thank you. I think it's really key because you just have this really nurturing and calming spirit. Anytime somebody is in your midst they can't help but feel slightly better than they felt before because you just have this aura about you that is just so soothing. From the first time I met you I was like I just want to sit and chill.

LATHAM I know. And then, I got to be on tour with you.

LUVVIE Yeah, for the Together tour. Oh, and every day before our tour started, Latham would basically relax us with these... what are those metal prongs that you use?

LATHAM Oh, I use tuning forks.

LUVVIE Yo, the tuning forks are so common for life. Oh, my goodness. I don't understand how you... you sometimes will turn up, but I'm like, yo, Latham just makes you want to get your life together.

LATHAM Oh, Luvvie. And you remind us all the time, constantly, to check how we're thinking, examine ourselves, to constantly be better. I mean, to write [The Do-Better Manual](#) but also to be embodying it every day and then to be reminding us every day to just check yourself real quick. Make sure your way out here isn't looking the fool. I'm also deeply inspired that you're walking your truth. You don't bite your tongue. You know what I mean? You let everything come as you feel called to put it out into the world and I believe that the words that you use because Luvvie is a gifted writer, we know this, a cultural critic and, I think, a seer. I really do think that you see the human condition and you find a way to package in a snackable away, the human condition for us to examine but also to laugh, and that's a gift because...

LUVVIE Thank you.

LATHAM You really do allow us, when there's times where it's like how can I find a way through this moment that's so intense or ugly to look at, you find a way to examine it and speak truth to it but also to make us laugh...

LUVVIE Oh, thank you.

LATHAM And I'm just so thankful for that because that's medicine too, Luvvie, whether you know that, that's like part of your wellness sorcery or not, that is. A lot of people I know have even said and I'm sure you've heard this directly from fans that a lot of people will say I got through this because of Luvvie or I was sad and I went to her blog or I was upset and then I went to the podcast, whatever it is, you have a way and I know the way I listen to the podcast is, if I have to do chores or if I'm flying or whatever, I just listen and it just keeps me uplifted.

So this is what we do, collectively, but you are so deep into your calling and it's so beautiful to see, like I'm a daily, I'm so thankful for social media because it allows us to get the richness of what you can offer us.

LUVVIE Oh, my gosh. You just made my whole heart smile. Thank you so much.

LATHAM It's true, girl.

LUVVIE I'm inspired by you because you show a different type of care for the world like the deep... that whole mothering the mother, you are absolutely doing that every single day and you've actually inspired me. You're part the reason why I ask my guests, what do you do to take care of yourself, it's like the closing question, because how you embody self-care, not just as a buzzword but as life itself, I mean I was like, yo, I got to really elevate that. So how do you do self-care? What do you do to take care of yourself as you're mothering mothers and bringing new life into this world?

LATHAM Thank you for that and I love this question and I love the answers that your guests have given too. You know, I am really, like I know I seem like a person that likes people and likes to be around people, I love to be alone. So I spend, I try to spend, get up early enough to where nobody's up yet or around so I can be by myself and not talk and not interact and just kind of deal with what I woke up with and I'll use that time to pray I'll often do some meditation. Sometimes I try to sit, if it's warm enough, I'll sit... I have a roof area so I'll sit there and then I try to reflect. I take my time. I don't like to rush my mornings. That's really when I set the tone for my day.

And I would definitely say that a big piece of my self-care practice is also not so much what I do but what I don't do. I'm really... and I know your opinion on this too, is like this life edit, like saying no and making sure to stay really, really tight with what's aligned with my intention and a lot of times that means that when you're examining those things, something that feels like, oh, this is awesome, but you know you shouldn't be doing it...

LUVVIE Yeah.

LATHAM You know what I mean? Like saying no to that and knowing that you knew what the right configuration and the exact sort of culmination of whatever this is will show up for me in a way that I can handle it and in a time frame that I can take it on, because if this is not the right time or if I feel pushed or it's too much, and I'm good at pushing as you know, but at certain points it's like you have to give and I think you're a great example of this too. It's like we can be on planes and trains and automobiles and whatever, but at a certain point there's a built-in rest, always.

LUVVIE Yep.

LATHAM So even when there's a lot of travel, there's rest. So to me it's about punctuating the day like that, thinking about and anticipating my needs and figuring out when I'm going to want a break and just building that in and not over scheduling and that doesn't mean that sometimes I won't have back, to back, to back but even when I'm doing back, to back, to back, it's what gives me joy that I'm doing back to back, right?

LUVVIE Um hmm. (affirmative)

LATHAM So I might have a really packed day but I feel energized at the end and then I might have a day where I have to do something that's so intense that even though it's one thing, I don't schedule around it because I know what it's going to take of me to do, so it's like figuring out that balance and I think we all need to do that for ourselves, like what tires me? What inspires me? What allows me to feel more fulfillment and that carries you more through the day, that gives you more energy, than the things that you have to do, that there are some things that we just have to do and those things, I make sure that I build in some portals of self-renewal around those areas, like I make sure that I build in, whether it's like I'm going to go for a walk or I'm going to eat lunch outside or I'm going to take a phone call from a friend or I'm going to read a book, or whatever that is, I figured it out and that's moment to moment and to me, that's real self-care, is when we can, on a moment to moment basis, check in with ourselves and figure out, okay, what do I need to feel most fulfilled in this moment and what's going to take care of my needs right now.

That's how I try to do it, so that it's not just like oh, let me go bubble bath away my problems, which is also fun, but to be honest, a lot of it is just I don't have to feel a buildup of issues if I'm on a moment to moment, making sure that I don't put too, too much on the plate. If it's like, okay, that can stay or let me delete that or let me just leave that alone entirely, and I know that this is something that we have to do when we get more refinement with and you do this so beautifully as well and I love that you also share this with a committee like how you edit and how you... I'm really, really busy right now but I'm also doing this. And so, it's really important for people to see that folks that they look up to, how they do these practices, so I love that you also share the insights of how you stay so focused, but also how you can get like 93 keynotes in, in one day, right?

LUVVIE Right.

LATHAM Yeah.

LUVVIE Right. Ah, listen. You're awesome, you're awesome, you're awesome. I'm so glad you were able to come on Rant and to drop some gems on the people and this is really insightful because I don't think people talk about Black women's maternal health enough and we don't have enough doulas, so you are serving as representation that does not really exist in droves for us, so thank you for that.

LATHAM Thank you for that and for the acknowledgement but also I want to remind people really quickly that this is our stuff, like our ancestors were the ones who were delivering all the babies. We were the ones who birthed this nation, so this is our work so even though you might think or might see more white women out here doing this work, this is our work to reclaim, so if you feel in any particular way called to do it, please pursue it because, like Luvvie said, we do need more Black women out here supporting and doing this work because we need people who look like us to support us and who understand our unique needs. It's so critical. So thank you Luvvie as well for also just inviting this type of conversation in because I also believe in what you said that our Black media and our... just places where our stories are being told, we're not getting to tell our own story, right?

LUVVIE Right.

LATHAM And I love that you bring people here who get to tell their story the way they want to tell their story versus someone else telling their story. So I'm just thankful because I learn so much about people that we would never learn about if they weren't in conversation with you in this way. So thank you for creating a platform to share and to be girlfriends and to just catch up, because it really is soothing.

LUVVIE I'm so glad to hear that. That was my mission for Rant, was to have conversation with interesting people and with my friends who happen to be interesting people, like you.

LATHAM Exactly. And we get to feel like we're with you every day. We get to feel like we're with you in your conversations literally how you talk to people and I just can't wait to hear... I'm like, okay, this thing happened. I can't wait to hear Luvvie talk about it. You know what I mean? So thank you for that because this is also part of my self-care, like listening to podcasts like yours. We have to see that there are things that make us strong. This is one of the things that I feel like fortifies me too, just like listening to you and other people too, that I listen to, but I'm grateful to have friends who actually create content that I want to consume and not just strangers that I like to consume, so yeah. Thank you.

LUVVIE Yes, yes, yes, yes. And people can follow you all over social @glowmaven. Y'all want to follow Latham because, literally, just following her makes you feel like you're a better person because sometimes she'll post something about like I need you to breathe today. You're like, you're right. I actually haven't really been breathing today. So yes, following you is part of my self-care. You are awesome for joining Rants. Thank you for being a part of the Rants fam now.

LATHAM I'm so excited.

LUVVIE Always, always, cheering for you and always looking forward to what you do next and thank you for the work that you do.

LATHAM Thank you, sis. Thank you, too.

LUVVIE And we will talk soon.

LATHAM All right, boo.

LUVVIE Bye.

LATHAM Bye.

Whew, Lord! Soooo many gems. This interview was a real eye-opener for me. Even as someone who hasn't given birth yet, I was reminded that an issue does not need to directly impact me for me to recognize it's a problem.

If your house is on fire, and I have a hose, I'm coming to help you put it out - that's what advocacy looks like. Standing alongside the marginalized and those with the most need to help raise awareness and win the fight for a better experience on this planet.

Now Latham is partnering with Lisa Price, founder of Carol's Daughter, to model advocacy for Black Maternal Health through an initiative called Love Delivered. You can learn more about their work and how to stand alongside them by visiting mamaglowfoundation.org and carolsdaughter.com/lovedelivered Be sure to follow Latham for all things Mama Glow and more noir pixie dust on Instagram and Twitter at @GlowMaven.

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Until next time, have the courage to speak your truth and show up as yourself. Create good trouble.

