

# BIPOC USHR: Journeys to Joy



## **EPISODE DESCRIPTION**

BIPOC USHR is hosting a takeover episode of 'the hidden island!' Listen to Sobia Ali-Faisal, Kendi Tarichia (King Kxndi), Amirah OyeseGUN and Stephanie Arnold talk about their experiences living on the Island – beginning in the 1980s up until today. They discuss the many barriers and discriminating experiences BIPOC folks living on the often Island face, and what the road to joy has looked like through it all.

BIPOC USHR's website: <https://www.bipocushr.org>

Features: Sobia Ali-Faisal, Kendi Tarichia (King Kxndi), Amirah OyeseGUN and Stephanie Arnold

*Ocean sounds. Rowing in canoe. Theme music introduces.*

Fiona: Welcome to the hidden island – a podcast where we talk about local Island history. My name’s Fiona Steele, and I’ll be your host for this journey.

*music swells up for a moment*

Fiona: Today, we're doing something different. I'm sitting here with Sobia Ali-Faisal with BIPOC USHR, and we're doing an episode takeover. Sobia. Can you tell me a bit about what you have planned for us?

Sobia: Sure. So, I'm the Executive Director of BIPOC USHR. Today, we have a conversation that came up organically through our own conversations. The four of us that you'll be hearing, have spent different amounts of time on PEI. And we have our own journeys that we've had on PEI. And a lot of times very difficult with a lot of barriers, a lot of issues that we've dealt with. But at the end of the day, we still experience a lot of joy, especially within our own company, within our own community. And so we thought that it'd be really interesting too, yes, talk about a lot of the difficulties and the challenges we've had here at PEI. But then how did we get to a point where we are joyous?

Fiona: Sometimes we think of history as being hundreds of years old. And BIPOC folks have been on PEI for centuries, but what we’re talking about today is recent social history. What this Island has felt like for four people who’ve been living here for a range of years starting in the 1980s up until today. So sit back and listen in.

Music transitions into panel

Kendi: My name is Kendi, King Kxndi. And a little bit about me. I grew up in Charlottetown in Mermaid, originally from Kenya, but we moved to Pei when I was in grade 10. So like 20 years ago? Yeah, mostly worked in community and as an artist, and I have a background in political science and a Bachelor of Education. And I love doing things that keep me engaged in my community. How long have I been in PEI? I said 20 years? Yeah, yeah. Thank you.

Amirah: My name is Amira, I grew up in Nigeria and I moved to Charlottetown in 2017. I graduated from UPEI, I finished my undergrad in foods and nutrition and I did the dietetic internship program. So my background is in dietetics. I'm currently working in the EDI space.

Sobia: So my name is Sobia Ali-Faisal, I moved here when I was five years old with my family. So that would have been in the mid 80s. We moved here because my dad got a job at UPEI.

## EPISODE SCRIPT

*Italics = sound effects*  
Regular = narration

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Sobia: And so I've been here for most of the time since minus 11 years that I spent in Ontario. I am the Executive Director of BIPOC USHR, I have a PhD in applied social psychology. My focus for my research was on Muslims and sexual health. I grew up watching a lot of Bollywood movies to stay connected with my culture. But yeah, I guess we'll get into that as well in a little bit. But yeah, I really am passionate about working for community and helping community in ways that I didn't have growing up here.

Stephanie: So I'm Stephanie Arnold. I moved to PEI nine years ago. I now I have two kids. Live here with our family - life moved us here. It was my partner's entrepreneurial adventures that took us here, it was an unexpected move. And here I am.

Sobia: So our first question to start off our discussion is what has life been like for you on PEI?

Stephanie: I can start. PEI has been different things to me over the last nine years. And I think it's because the longer you're here, the more people you meet or the things you experience, it just changes your answer to that question. If you'd asked me, you know, in the first three years of moving here, it was a great place to raise a family. My second was born here, in Charlottetown. I live in the North Shore. And it was a really great place to raise a family, it was quiet. It wasn't the rat race that I would have found in Toronto, I did not feel like I was in a rat race when I was in Toronto. But then at the same time, I was a young professional rather than a mom of two. But now that I'm here, I still love Toronto, I have a network there have relatives there. But I don't think I'd ever want to move back there. That's not a lifestyle that I see for myself. And so at the time, I was like you know what, PEI just sort of presents itself to you when you need it in your life, because it felt like it was the right time - gave me the right thing at the right time. But things did change. I've never really faced microaggressions in Toronto, I know that's a really big jump into heavy topic, but it's just I've never experienced things I experienced here that I did in Toronto. And it's, I wasn't questioning my decision. But oh, the shine's a little off. And so I felt like the more you see, and the more you feel, and the more you notice, I probably came to a point where I didn't know what to do with all of it. And then eventually, when I met people who have similar experiences and have navigated, I've learned a lot from them. And so now, I feel like I've come to the other side a little bit. I felt like I found my voice. A voice I didn't know I had deep inside and that I needed to bring up to the surface. And I'm probably at the moment, earlier today thought to myself, I'm probably happier now than I've been in a really long time. And I can't explain why. But it's just been.

Amirah: It's because you have us in your life. Stephanie.

Stephanie: Yeah. You're probably right

Kendi: Of course, Amirah would take credit for that. Definitely. Because you know.

Sobia: Yeah, yeah. And that speaks to community, too. Right? I mean, your sense of community here, Steph, with us. For sure.

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Kendi: Yeah, like PEI without community is really hard. Because it's such a niche experience. Like if you like up UPEI, wow, my student days are over. PEI is like, like, I like what you said Steph that like PEI gives you like what you need. And like, I feel like the aesthetic, like the slow pace, the long even the long winters, you can like, just really like even like work on yourself or like build your business or different things. You're not in like the big urban chase, but it comes with a different, like almost like a, like a crazy side of it, where it's very quiet, and it's not talked about. And so when you get here, there's this confusion of like, oh, this place is great, but it feels so bad. And that, like really messes with your head when you're alone in it. But when you meet other folks, they're like, Oh, me too. Me too. Are you like, oh, okay, this is basically what like, the racism oppression looks like in PEI, it's, it's niche to Pei and like, if you don't live here, when the first few months here like you don't understand what it is. And so, for me, my time on PEI has really been journeying through being kind of clueless to like PEI's racism because we moved from Quebec to like, really understanding it to then really helping people understand it to now just like, you know, like, I hear what you're saying about not wanting to leave. But for me, it's just like one of those things where it's like, if it's not gonna get better, like, I've experienced it for 20 years, like at different varying scales, and I'm just like, I'm on the other end of that, where I'm like, I need something different. Like, I'm sure there's so many different forms of oppression in the world, but I'm just tired of this. This certain brands, you know, I'm over it. Yeah. So like, it's a crazy journey.

Sobia: It's interesting, because for me, PEI is, you know, divided into two parts of my life: Pre-Ontario and post Ontario. So when I listened to you guys talking about like coming here and what it's like here, when you've had experiences elsewhere, for me, my first half of my life I moved here when I was five, so five to about my early to mid 20s. I didn't notice a lot of the problems. I didn't notice the microaggressions. Well, no, I should actually I shouldn't say that. I felt them. I felt them, something felt wrong. There were so many spaces in which I would walk into and I just felt immediately almost, like, sad or depressed. Or just this like, yeah, it just, it was just never a good, a good feeling. So I felt it. But I didn't know that's what it was. I thought, I'm just like, I'm just shy. I'm introverted. I don't like being around people. So I figured that's what it always was. But it wasn't until I moved to Ontario, and I went to graduate school. And then I started talking to people. And that's when they started to say, No, that was racism. That was exclusion. That was, they didn't we didn't use microaggressions. I didn't hear at that time. But that's what they were talking about. And I never planned to move back to PEI, like that was like the most laughable idea for me. In Ontario. people be like, gonna move back. I'm like, Are you crazy? Like, of course not. Why the Why would ever move back to PEI? And even on visits home. I was like, yeah, no, this is nice to visit. But I can never come back here. By the time we decided to come back, PEI was very different. And that's the only reason I came back if PEI had been the way it was, when I left, I still wouldn't, I would not have come back, there's no way I would have come back. It was it was only because when I would each summer, I would come back or each winter, I'd come back to visit. And I started to see more diversity and more diversity. And then eventually, me and my husband were at a point where we didn't really have to be where we were in Ontario, and we just kind of needed some space and time to just rethink and regroup. And so we decided to come back here. But definitely the there's still places here that trigger me.

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Sobia: There are still people and you know, just yeah, things that I have those those kind of negative feelings or sad feelings those depressed feelings come back when I'm in certain spaces when I see certain things. And so that's why yeah, having BIPOC USHR having the you guys and having the community that I do now helps me be able to stay here, because a lot of the old feelings that I had, would push me away from here, really so yeah, my PEI experience is definitely divided into two sections: like pre Ontario and post Ontario.

Amirah: So I have just the one PEI experience. So I moved to PEA in 2017 and I was 17 at the time I moved here for university by myself. I traveled halfway across the world for university. And yeah, like PEI, what I describe and this is like a gross exaggeration. But do you guys know the horror movie *midsummer*? No. Okay, so basically *midsummer* is a horror movie that happens in one of those. One of those one of those regions in the world where it's like sunlight 24 hours. So a lot of terrible things are happening, but it's so pretty. Like there's so many pretty flowers, everyone's wearing like the most colorful, the most gorgeous dresses. It is so pretty, but so many awful things are happening. So I feel like that's what like and that's like obviously like a gross exaggeration, but I often feel like that's what I described PEI like, one thing about PEI is that PEI is so beautiful. PEI is arguably one of the most beautiful places I've been, like in the summer. When I'm driving. I'm just like, Wow, this place is gorgeous. But then when you start to spend more and more and more time here and then you start to like accumulate all of these experiences. You're then Like, okay, okay, I see it now. And I feel like for me, that's what makes it like I always feel like I have a toxic relationship with PEI. Because especially in the winter, I'm like I'm leaving this place this place has very little to offer me, I could be doing so like I can be doing so much outside of here. But then summer comes and I'm like, this is the most beautiful place I've ever seen in my life. Like my experience here in Pei has been very interesting. When I first moved here, I also had what I call it like the honeymoon phase where it was like, Oh my God, this place is so perfect. And it's so amazing. And you know, like nothing, like nothing could ever go wrong until many things started to go wrong. And I will say I was shielded a lot when I like after because I I met Sophia in 2019. So I moved here in 2017. And for like the entirety of my first year, like I had experienced, like, microaggressions and there are so many things where like, I couldn't like, like adequately articulate that like, okay, these I should not be dealing with these things. But that only lasted like two years like after that I met Sobia. And after I met Sobia, I met BIPOC USHR. And I always say like, you know, like the BIPOC USHR is like the logo is like an umbrella. And so I feel like that's what BIPOC USHR has been for me, BIPOC USHR has been somewhat of like, a shield for me from all these experiences. Because now that I know that these things are happening in other spaces, I'm able to like assert myself and like, sort of like adequately respond when those things are happening to me. But yeah, like my relationship with Pei has been very interesting. But like, one thing I'll appreciate with like, being here on the island is finding community if I like because I graduated, I graduated just May of this year. And after graduation, I was ready to dip. I was looking for like jobs elsewhere and all of that. But then I was just like, I can't, I don't want to leave my friends. So those are part of like first, like moving is stressful. But then because I had such amazing community, I had such fulfilling friendships, like leaving PEI, like became really hard. So that's why I always say it's like it's a bit of a toxic relationship. But like I do genuinely enjoy the community that I have here on the island and the people that I've gotten to meet and the experiences that I've had with all these amazing people.

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Stephanie: I'm gonna jump off what you said about umbrella and their logo and community and friends. Because it's not I don't know, we're not a sword. Sometimes we're a sword. Sometimes we're a shield. But the most important thing I think it's the bond I think the bond we have. I don't know if community is stronger than friendship. I feel like we're not social friends. I feel like we are, musketeers is weird. That's a weird metaphor, but a very special and unique bond that ties us and I think the power of it. It's not strength in numbers. It's not the numbers itself. What I got so much out of it. And what has given me that voice I mentioned earlier is the amount of learning and unlearning I've done by being with this group of people. And the many different chats sometimes they're very serious. Sometimes they're very silly and goofy. But all of us really, we build each other up and we build ourselves up and we make the community or community ties with among each other a lot stronger. And I think that's what really keeps me here like you say it like what friends and it's like, if without BIPOC USHR, I don't think I would still be on PEI

Kendi: Steph, just say we love each other. Yeah, that's what we love each other. Like, I think that's like, my favorite thing is that we found each other and then like it's that depth of it where it's like I know I'm never alone anymore, especially in a place it really isolates like that. Like sometimes like man that chat some of our chats go into the weirdest hours like you just like roll over in bed. All right, pals, like it's 6am. Yeah, like calm down. The weirdest things like

Stephanie: Shine bright like a diamond

Kendi: Eddie Bauer, right? Yeah, it's just so much joy has come from like, finding each other. And, you know, I know like, we're constantly hearing like, how can you retain people in PEI retention, retention? But like, even here, there's a common underlying theme that like we all like, would stay like if you hadn't gotten this. You wouldn't have stayed right like and, like, I wish more people could find community especially bipoc folks in PEI, because it actually makes it a place where you want to live right? Like, and I don't think, Amirah back to what you said to I don't think it's like, or for me, it's not a toxic relationship with PEI. PEI has a toxic relationship with me. Because I'm trying to I'm trying to love this place, man, I love this place. But you know, the problem is what PEI won't love me right back. Like it's not in the way I deserve to be loved. You know. And I think until we get to the point where I can love folks like us correctly, then we'll want to stay like. So far, it's happening in our spaces, but not across the board. You know? Yeah.

Sobia: That's such a good point. That is such a good point. They don't, Pei doesn't love us, because I feel the same way I would love to stay here. I mean, just the this, the smallness of the place the safety. And I like I keep trying to give it chances. And the only reason again, like I said I stay is because of our community because of us. But it's like the systems the, the, you know, PEI itself is just like, No, we don't really want you here, you know, we're, the messaging consistently seems to be from so many spheres that they want us almost to look good. But they don't recognize what we need. And the only reason I say that is because we we tell them, right, we tell people what we need. It's not like we're being quiet about it anymore. But the response is, you know, it's lukewarm at best.

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Stephanie: I think it depends on what the goal is, right? If the goal is recruitment and retention based on economic goals, then what's the minimum you have to put in to get the maximum or the like, whatever threshold of economic output you're looking for. So sometimes it feels like they need labor. And so they'll do the minimum. And it's really weird, because yes, like, BIPOC USHR, and the love we have for each other is keeping me here. But then you have really awful things happen to you. Like getting substandard health care that could put you and your child at risk. And then you like, how do I reconcile the two? Right because I do have a stubborn optimism for PEI, I have a stubborn optimism that this place with its community mindedness that it can pull together that we the critical mass, we need to get us over that hump isn't that many compared to larger provinces? So I have a stubborn optimism. But Pei sometimes just like squanders chances, and you're like, how many more opportunities will it squander until that maybe it's just like a hump? I don't know. Maybe we've done all we could. And that's sad. Yeah. Yeah.

Sobia: Yeah, squanders chances. That's a really great, because I've seen that happen, right? We've all seen that happen, where we're like, here, we're handing you information, we're handing you resources on a gold platter. We're giving this to you, like willingly, take it. And mmm like, No, thank you. No, it's just so it's really that's hard to see is when we do offer so much. And we do offer our greatness, you know, our wisdom our knowledge our experience. And the response is not at all what we would hope.

Amirah: And one thing I think about PEI is that I think PEI is very, very, very scared of change. And Pei as a whole is very resistant to change. And so we have a situation where the demographic of PEI is changing because UPEI is continuously recruiting people from other countries like I know UPEI has. UPEI puts in so much work to recruit people from specifically Nigeria, because I know like when I was like, when I was done with high school, there was so many brochures of UPEI everywhere and UPEI had all these agents coming to like, high schools in Nigeria being like, Do you know where you should go? UPEI. So UPEI puts in a lot of work to recruit, but the issue is, UPEI has like PEI a whole has such high rates of turnover because the PEI is so resistant to change like people and and this is something like I've heard a lot of islanders say like with their full chest. It's not something like you're shy about we want our island to stay the same way. We want our island

Kendi: Make the Island great again. Yeah.

Amirah: Like we want our island to stay small, like all these, all these things. And so like, those are because when we talk about like when we talk about these, like white supremacists and discriminatory systems? Yes, there are systems but it's individuals who hold these systems, individuals who continue to uphold the system, so just a lot of islanders are so resistant to change. And that's why like, I find even like the work we're doing at bipoc ushr, like because what we're doing at BIPOC USHR is different is very foundational work. We're like the first of its kind in other provinces.



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Amirah: They've been doing this work, they've been doing this work, but like we started doing this work 10, 20 years ago even but Pei has just like, caught up and also very random, but like, even like in nutrition, like, like the diet trends, like the diet trends come to Pei so late like, because we like we do we do learn about like, like diet like fad diet trends and all of that and like consistently, PEI is always like a 8-9 years behind on the fad diet trends, but PEI just like, stays behind on a lot of things because of how resistant a lot of people are to change. And like obviously, like everybody knows this quote, but the most, the only constant thing is change, right?

Kendi: And I feel that, you know, like I struggle with change, like, and I constantly have to remind myself that and like I have, like intense nostalgia, like I went into downtown convenience after they renovated and I cried like a baby. You know, like that convenience store has been the same since I was a teenager and I was just like, No, the new library had. It's beautiful. But when I first heard the other library was closing, I was like, What are you doing PEI? But like Change is hard, but like it's inevitable, right? And I think PEI's issue too is that like, PEI's resistance to change is increasing the racism, like everyone's like, Oh, it's so much more diverse. It's such a nice thing. And I'm like, true, true story. But I've never felt more unsafe. So where's that feeling coming from? And it's because the more diversity increases, the more a certain brand of people are like, Oh, hell no, not on my island. And they're becoming more loud, vicious about it. And I don't like the feeling of walking on eggshells.

Kendi: Like, there's a video Sobia you shared in one of the workshops we were doing, and it was like, the expectation of racism impacts your mental health, right? I feel like now what's changed is I'm constantly expecting racism when I leave my house, where before, it depends on where I was engaging. Like, I could at least be like, Okay, I just won't go here. I wouldn't do this. But now it's almost like, I even I don't have a read on it anymore. You know. And so that's something that I'm noticing that PEI is like, that's that brand of people, it's just become intense, and uncomfortable. And that's part of the driver of leaving, you know, and I feel really sad that so many people leave Pei, because PEI also has this like, incredible ability to, like, bring, like literally magical people. I'm just like, Wait, where you do what now? How'd you end up doing this? Like, or like just something very unique? Like, I don't know, like, the people here are incredible. And then to only want them to stay for a short term, why not have like a long term intention with people's lives? Like, if it's economic retention, then it's making people disposable, like, Okay, you worked three summers, now you can go off to the mainland. Whereas if they looked at as, like, you don't imagine a 50 year plan a lifetime plan for like, bipoc folks to stay here. I think this place would be moving, like really differently. You know, because, especially for me, I feel like experience a little bit more so in the systems. Yeah. You know, it's not on the street every day, but like, that same brand of people are strong in the systems. So you go to get health care, that's where you might experience racism. I go to the convenience store, there's probably someone who's bipoc working, I'm not experiencing it there anymore. If I go to the grocery store, same thing. There's a lot of racialized folks. But if I go to the doctor, if I go into the justice system, if I go any system, I'm facing a challenge. Yeah. If I go to Service Canada, like proving, Oh, do you have you know, are you sure you have an a one on your Social Insurance Number? And it's like, bro, what are you saying? Yeah.



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Kendi: And so it's just like, it seems, because people don't expect that brand again, of racism in systems. You know, they think oh, no, like, PEI organizations, and like health care would be so liberal, right? But it's like, no, like, we're experiencing violence when, right, our most vulnerable, when you need something?

Sobia: Exactly.

Stephanie: I'm going to push back on your term of saying leave, I don't think people are leaving, I think people are forced to leave. Because even here in fields like healthcare, where it's really hard to retain and recruit. People want to stay. But the challenges they have to face in trying to stay are thrown up in and it's like, they're forced to leave, they don't want to leave. And we've heard stories sort of internally with people coming to us. So it's like, make up your mind PEI Yeah. What do you want?

Sobia: And it feels that we need doctors who are being forced to leave because of the racism they're experiencing from administration. You know, how many racialized teachers do we have here? If the ones who come here faced so much discrimination, racism from their colleagues from others? I mean, even there are parents with kids in the school system. You know, kids are experiencing racism. When they try to get it addressed, nothing comes of it. People are being forced to leave people are being forced to leave like, again, I'll say this one and one more time. If it wasn't for you guys. If it wasn't for bipoc uchr, I would also leave. I would also leave, you know, especially after we've seen as an organization, the things that we've seen, sort of like the the underbelly, I guess, in some ways, right? Because we're seeing a lot of what even other bipoc people don't necessarily see. We hear the stories that they're not even hearing. So we're seeing all the reasons that people are leaving. And it's, I've had moments, even in the last, you know, few months, where I'm like, What am I doing here? Yeah, why am I even here? I can go to Ontario, I was just in Ontario few months ago, visiting family. And it just it felt, so I felt so relaxed. I'm like, wow, this is this is nice. You know, and so you start to think, what am I even doing here. And then I just, I just, it's just my need to protect people that keeps me here, because I'm like, if I'd leave, if I leave at this time, our organization could fall apart. And then what then who protects bipoc people here?

Stephanie: I might leave if you leave

Amirah: Same,

Sobia: Exactly and the whole organization would just fall apart. And if you left, I would leave, right? If you guys left, I would leave

Stephanie: I want to give a shout out though too, there are people as like we're speaking so broadly, in general, and we do have to deal with the bad side of PEI. I want to give a shout out to people who are trying to change, right, we just need that number to be a lot bigger and to be a lot more widespread. Because you know, what, a dozen people, 20 people, even 100 people, that's not enough. So I think there's an opportunity for the rest of the people who aren't doing anti-oppressive work. It doesn't have to be that that's your main job. It's just how you conduct yourselves, right?

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Stephanie: And how do you hold yourself accountable? How do you hold your neighbors accountable? How would you hold your family accountable? If more people are doing that work, this place will be better for everyone. And I think that's a point that not everyone understands, like when we do anti-racism work. We're not doing this to only improve the lives of racialized people. Because when we're doing anti-racism work, we're also supporting people who are racialized and living with poverty. We're supporting people who are racialized and have mental health illnesses. We're supporting anti-oppression work for everyone. And so maybe the the sooner people get on board with that, the more likely they will pitch in their time and their efforts. And I think we just need more of that very quickly. Yeah. And not let more people continue to get hurt by the systems. Yeah.

Kendi: and PEI does have like that good. Like PEI is so far behind that, I think it still carries certain elements or understandings of community that like, I feel like if PEI ignores, especially like American propaganda of like, the last 10 years, and really just focuses and consolidates on like being a good place for everyone, right? Because I think that's an issue with PEI too, is that like i feel like PEI struggles that like an inferiority syndrome, so they're always trying to compare themselves with the mainland or with somebody else, instead of just being like, no, here, this is how we want to do it. But because PEI is constantly consuming like, American or mainland propaganda, it's like, no, you have the opportunity here, in a smaller community like that, that stubborn optimism, stubborn optimism that you said, like I feel that about, so you could you could, you really could. And then like, almost every day, I'm like, but you don't want to, but you don't want to you just don't want to. And that is so frustrating. Like, honestly, part of my leaving is just like, bro, you're so capable, but you're just not doing the thing. You know. And that frustrates me almost more because I'm like, You're so close.

Stephanie: Yeah, we are pretty close. I always feel like we're at the cusp.

Sobia: Yeah, I know. That's the thing.

Kendi: The longest cusp

Stephanie: It's gonna go on forever, but it's like 10 minutes of driving. Another terrible metaphor. Sorry.

Sobia: Yeah, no, I agree. I mean, I I'm optimistic too. And I think the reason is, because there are, there are good people absolutely there. We can't deny. And I'm like, I've worked with them. And I've worked with people who are like in the system who really want to do the right thing. And who really do believe in, you know, things that we believe in. But it's just, they're not necessarily the decision makers. They're not necessarily or they might have some level of power, but they can't just they can't do it on their own. And they need others on board and those others aren't always on board. But yeah, the fact that we are so small, I think puts it puts us at a huge advantage. Because we can try things we can without too much risk, right? I mean, we can try some new way of doing stuff. And then yeah, and then that could potentially work. And it's not like, it could benefit so many people. Right? So I think the our smallness, works to our advantage. But it's just the barriers feel sometimes really, really high.

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Kendi: Think it's like, almost like PEI needs to be small but mighty. But right now, PEI is kind of playing more like small, but Meek, almost too scared to like, change, you know, and the change, it's not even like hard changes. It's like, I think the hardest part is that it's individual changes, right? Like, it's, it's a self discipline to be like, I don't want to hurt my community anymore. Anybody my community anymore. And so that means like, you start to move different, but that's in your own home, and you're with your own self. And a lot of islanders are like, a lot of, I think a lot of the world but here like just the isolation of there's a culture here, people are just like, No, no, no, I'm happy to where I am, I'm happy the way things are, and nothing should change anymore. But like those changes are, like, inherently good for you. It's like, you'll be a better person, you'll be a happier person, you'll have more community, you'll be more connected, like, only good has come out of my life, from all those things. Like from being like, you know what, I started loving me, I started loving y'all like I was able to be like, You know what, I never want to hurt Sobia I never want to hurt. Really anyone. So then you move with a certain ideology, right? But it's a small change, but it's a big change. And like, the craziest thing is that like, here they can, but then it's like, too scared to do it.

Sobia: That's it. The courage, there's no courage, like, I keep saying this. We as racialized people are incredibly courageous and incredibly brave. And sometimes, like, we'll do things, and we're like, yeah, we'll just we just do it, we're scared, but we do it and then look at people in position of power white people, and they just won't, and I'm like, why?

Amirah: Comfort. They're comfortable, where where they're at, whereas racialized people were not comfortable where we're at. And so it's that need to maintain the status quo, because the status quo benefits them. And so that's exactly what it is. And so like, that's also like, a big part of like, because I always say that it could be part of like, having like, an individualistic mindset versus a, like a collectivist mindset. So, because status quo benefits a lot of people individually, and like their immediate family, whereas it puts a lot of the community at a disadvantage, but people are okay with that. As long as they are well fed, and they're okay then mmm. Whereas we're starting to see, like, within like racialized communities and queer communities, we're starting to see a lot of people, you know, organizing for the sake of not just themselves, but for the community, as at large, so

Sobia: Especially with racialized queer communities. Yeah, I think for us like, because we've dealt with colonization and imperialism and immigration trauma, and just the things that we've had to deal with over the last few 100 years, we've had no choice. We've just been in this constant state of discomfort constantly. So it's like, well, we just have to we have to resist, we have no choice. And it's just become almost, like, genetically ingrained in some ways that because we've dealt with all this massive oppression for so many years, decades, centuries. We just have that that drive. But yeah,

Stephanie: that's new for me, because I came here. So I wasn't gonna tell you where I came here from I came to Canada as a model minority. And I did all my model minority stuff growing up, I kept my head down. I studied hard. I

Amirah: was good at math. played the piano.

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Stephanie: yes. I studied engineering, I did my MBA, I did all the model minority things. And I worked hard, right? If you work hard success comes to you. But it's coming here it was a shock. That Chinese people weren't model minorities here. Chinese people were awful PNP people, right? And so everyone assumes I came here on a PMP. I was like, No, I came here from Toronto. And I had to learn because I think that's why I did not sense or receive microaggressions in Toronto, because I was seen as a model minority. So when that I guess I don't know what they're called when whatever with that, but the idea of that doesn't exist here. And I'm no longer that. That's when I realized, oh, shoot, this is what racism feels like. It's awful. No but it took time but what so when I said in the beginning where I had to learn and unlearn a lot of stuff. It's like I understood racism, but it didn't wouldn't have affected me in Toronto the way like, the way that anti Blackness affect the Black community. Right? So there wasn't a strong anti-Chinese racism when I grew up there or maybe I was shielded from it because I was among a lot of racialized friends. But here there such strong anti Chinese sentiments, I had to learn to deal with that. And I'm gonna I'm really lucky that I found this group because I was having a hard time figuring things out. Because how do you learn and unlearn unless you're able to learn from someone that have already gone through that process a little bit. And so that's how bipoc ushr really changed my mindset and understanding of who I am and how society ought to be and how it isn't. Right? Thanks for laughing at me, though.

Sobia: I never thought of that. There's no such thing as a model minority on PEI. That's true. Like even growing up here. I mean, so me, my family is Muslim. So in some ways that muddies the water even though we're South Asian, many South Asians are seen as model minorities, but then Muslims are seen as dangerous. So we're kind of depending on how people view us. mind you growing up, no one here knew what a Muslim was or what a Pakistani was. So it was just it was, yeah, it was it was that was, it was sort of, like very invisible, I think in that way. But you're right. There's no such thing as a model minority on PEI

Stephanie: which I think is better, right. Like, it's good that you didn't adopt that, because that is just another weird skewed form of racism anyway. So it's one of those things where they're 10 years behind that they didn't quite catch on, which is not a bad thing.

Sobia: Yeah. That's interesting,

Stephanie: basically recoruiting those folks to maintain the status quo. Like, I felt used now that I know what it was what this whole thing the scheme is, like a big scheme.

Sobia: Yeah. Yeah.

Kendi: being Black, like, I don't think we get the model minority. Amirah did an eye roll. And like, I went to a pretty, I moved to Montreal first, I went to a pretty Black school. That was pretty woke, especially for like, the early 2000s. And I'm in eighth grade. And they teaching you about like, settler colonialism and like Zionism, and like, just trying to be like, the world is more complex than just like math and like, social studies, so they would ingrain it in what we're learning in a really cool way.

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Kendi: Like most of my teachers there were Black. And so when my mom told me, we're moving to Pei, I remember I went and asked me geography teacher, my geography teacher was actually Kenyan. And he, he first started laughing at me. And then he was like, first of all, do you even know where you're going? And then I said, No, and he's like, I failed you in geography. None of us knew where PEI was. He's like, I remember he's just like Anne of Green Gables. And we're just like, what? so then we move to PEI. And here like that first summer. Like, y'all like, you know, I grew up in Nairobi, where I didn't stand like I didn't even know what being Black was. Then in Montreal, I was introduced to this concept of being Black. But again, I'm in a primarily Black school, they hang out with primarily Black youth. Then I come here, and like the only way I can describe it as a circus freak.

Stephanie: Mm hmm. Yeah. I said that really loud.

Sobia: I think we can all relate to that.

Kendi: It was the first time where it's like, I remember walking to the cafeteria in school and everybody turning like in the movies and being like what the Fu\*k. Yeah. And like, oh, and then like, I remember after, like, the first two days that happening, I started to eat lunch at home, which is not something I did in other schools I went to, but I was, I felt safer, not even from like, anything physical, just like, stop staring at me like that. Yeah. It's also a certain stare. And I was just like, can this not happen. And then these folks accidentally put me in an ESL class. I speak English, French at this point. I'm like, bro, I'm good. But I walked into that class. And there was folks from Somalia, from the Dominican, from Brazil, from Sweden. There was folks from like Ghana, like even other people who spoke English, African countries, but in that room, I remember just being like, oh, and so I stayed in ESL, because it's not English I'm here for it's the culture. Yeah, exactly. But that protected me so hard in PEI, because from there, that was what grade 11 I just moved with bipoc, folks. And so my experience even if PEI so different, where I'm like, like, a lot of my friends and my community has been bipoc. But it's been in silos, like I have friends who are I have areas that go that are heavily white, and then I have areas that I go that are heavily bipoc and that's the sad part is that like, it's the white group that actually creates that segregation, right. They don't engage as much with our communities as they should, or as much as even say they want to or they will, but they don't actually act on it. So it's like, yeah, lowkey segregation.

Sobia: Yeah, the circus freak comment, I can relate to it so much, having grown up on PEI in the 80s and 90s. Anytime I would go out with my family, there's like five of us, it was rare that I would want to because as soon as you step out, people are looking at you like, oh my god has a pack of them. Oh my god, like, everyone's looking and you feel so uncomfortable. But think about like how that messes with your own relationship with your family. Because it's like, the people like the white people who are staring at you are the ones you should be angry with. But I ended up getting angry at my family for wanting me to go out with them. Like my parents as a teenager. I'm like, No, I'm not gonna go out with you. People stare at us, what are you talking about? But it was really the people that I should have been getting angry at. But that messes your relationship up with your family.

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Sobia: So yeah, it's in your community. Because what we also didn't do was those of us who were not related, but we're all like brown. We didn't hang out with each other either in public, we were always were like, no, if we hang out, people are gonna stare at us

Amirah: and they're gonna be scared,

Sobia: and they're gonna be scared, and they're gonna think we're up to something like dangerous like our Muslim community. Sometimes I'd have like eid picnics at like the beach or the park. And we'd always sit there and laugh at the white people looking at us, because we're like, they think we're up to like, planning some terrorist activity I know. And we just laugh about it. So, okay, with now that we're all like, kind of laughing a lot joy, what, what is joy here? For us?

Amirah: I think joy, like we've talked, we've touched on that a lot. And like throughout this conversation is that regardless of like all the experiences that like we faced on the island, we're still able to find joy in all of the most profound moments, we're still able to, finding each other is like a big element of joy. Like, I think the biggest thing with joy on the island, especially if you're racialized is finding community, because Pei can be so isolating, especially when you move here, when you're racialized, and you move here from a different country, Pei can be so so isolating. And so finding community is finding joy. And like community isn't because I just like recently learned this like community isn't like I've shifted my mind from community being about people who have shared experiences, more so to people who have shared goals. So what are our goals for PEI, do our goals for like PEI? Our future not just not even just like, the future of PEI, but the future like our planet as a whole? Like, what are our goals? For all of that? Like, for me? That is what community is?

Kendi: Think like, joy for me is that? Like, y'all really see me? Like, I can show up, man, okay. I can show up in so many ways. And I know that I'll be safe to be me, in spaces with y'all. And I think what community now really means to me is that is that like, places I can be myself places I can show the multifacetedness of myself. And it's ricocheted into other areas of my life where now I'm adamant that in other spaces, I get to be as much of myself as possible instead of like, performative, or like picking and choosing. It's trickled into so many of my other relationships where I'm just like, no, like, if I can't feel like this, it ain't worth it for me, bro. And so y'all have taught me how I want to be loved. And it's just so crazy, because I never imagined that here. Like, you know, like, I never and then also from like a group of folks who are different, different faith backgrounds, different ethnicities, different upbringing. Like we come from such a variety of backgrounds, that honestly I feel like, in like the world we live in, we have more to beef about but we're just like, hell nah we're just magic with each other, you know, like, and we've just found so many ways to like, surpass what society expects a group of us to feel or engage how we're supposed to engage with each other like, you know, the divide and conquer concept that they all started whatever, we're shattering that, you know, like, I mean, that's what it just really feels like it's like, you've shown me how I deserve to be loved. But you've also shattered divide and conquer in my world. I'm like, No, I just want to see unity and love and this feeling for everyone,

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Stephanie: You know, it was a really fun recent afternoon for me was the Eid picnic? I did not know what Eid was before BIPOC USHR. And like you say it brought together like our communities, a community of very many very, very many different backgrounds. And it's so fun to participate. And it's because it feels good to see a community be able to celebrate their holidays, because you don't get that in public schools, right? Yeah, you don't get to learn about them. You don't get to practice them. But let's make space and do that. And then from me to also be invited to participate. And then we just had a really lovely afternoon in the park. I got henna done for the first time because I never wanted to do henna from like, outside of what's culturally appropriate, because you can go to a street vendor, like up and down and harbourfront maybe and get henna just for fun. But that doesn't never felt right. So it just felt so good. And it was weird, because it's like, it's not about us accepting Muslim holidays. It was more about Muslims letting me hang out with them and celebrate something and just like it's everything. We turn things upside down. And we just centre love. Yeah, I think that for me is the power that we have in our group. Yeah. And what brings all of us joy.

Sobia: Yeah. Yeah, the centering of love is so so important. It's like I think it was it's a quote of Che Guevara's, but something about how the heart of any revolution revolutionary person, I guess, it's love, like love is at the heart of revolution. It's not hatred. It's not anger. It's not power. It's really love. And I think that is so important. Like, I've been reading about, like, you know, Sufi understandings of love and Rumi's writing on love that, you know, gave me the book. And so I've been reading a lot about love a lot more. And I think that is so central. Love doesn't necessarily and I've been reading about this too. It's not sappy, like love isn't like, oh, you know, just flowers.

Amirah: It's a power and divine Force on this planet

Kendi: Exact, so radical.

Amirah: I think like heteronormativity teaches us that, like love is between a boy and a girl and they meet each other and they kiss

Kendi: Chocolate and flowers. And it's just like, romantic. Whereas love is revolutionary. Like when I think of the love I have for y'all is that, like, if you're in a situation and you need help, I want to be there to help you. But if I can't help you, I want to stand beside you. I want to be there for you until you make it to the other side. And then I want to laugh with you and make jokes with you. I'm so sorry you can't trust me to not cuss. But like, you know, like, I want to also be there with you in like the healing process and gas you up and like, see through like multiple stages of your life, right? Like, it's this. There's like, a radical long term depth and like, man, like, media got it all wrong. Like media sold me that messed up version of like, love for the longest. No, this is love. Like, yeah,

Amirah: If my parents asked me why I'm not dating. I'm gonna say it's because BIPOC USHR. Sure, because like, I feel like I am whole, like, I don't feel a need for, like, a romantic type of love. feel a need for a romantic type of love because I have such fulfilling platonic relationships that like it's just like, if I like if someone comes around romantically and they're like, Okay, you're cool, then fine, but it's not. It's not a need, like I'm happy in the relationships that I built.



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Stephanie: Can I turn this around a little bit, and put PEI in the focus again, like, you know, like the trope of you don't like it just leave. It's like Nah, we love it here. It's like the thing you talk about the force and the revolution. It's not because we hate PEI. It's because we love PEI. We want to see, we know it can be a better place for all including the people saying that to us. It can be a better place for you too. We're willing we're willing to accept your imperfections. But it's love; it's like it's not it's not just the lovey dovey Hollywood happy ending. Love is hard work.

Sobia: And it's also like, remembering whose land we're actually on right because we love and honor the original inhabitants of this land who it was stolen from right? We will respect and honor the fact that this is their land. This is the land of the Mi'kmaq. And so that love for decolonization and when we think about whose land this really truly is, yes, that is a land worth loving.

Kendi: I hear that, but as a person who is adamant on leaving, I also just want to say that, like, I think there's also the reality of how much you can give to PEI, like, you know, and I think, I don't even think mine is permanent. But there's also like this part where it's like, wow, like, it's a lot. You know, I think I'm starting to have more empathy with people who are just like, I don't know, bro, like, maybe I'll just leave for a little bit and come back. Or maybe I'll just leave permanently, like, mine is like, I'll leave and watch and come back. But I think it's that like, like, I love this place so much. But there's also self preservation, that comes into play with PEI, because it's like, especially, I think, when you deal with, like, mental health, like, I feel like there's times when PEI's literally driving me crazy, you know, like the stifling-ness. And then like, you're getting certain experiences from certain people, and you're seeing them all the time. Like, you know, like, there's almost like, it feels constricting. That's the word I'm looking for. Like, there's a constricting that I start to feel here. And as much as I love PEI, like I really pray that this place can change and be the place that I can, like, stay. You know, like, I have so much faith in this place doing that. But I'm also like, Yeah, I'm gonna see what the world has to offer for a minute. Because you guys, I might come back and be like, Whoa, like, when I went to Toronto, then it came back and I was like, wow, the mainland is crazy. I like it here. I might come back and be like, Wow, the rest of the world is crazy. I'm back. Who knows? But like, it's just like, some adventure to see. Like, is it better?

Sobia: Yeah, yeah, I mean, self love is important.

Stephanie: But love isn't unconditional. I don't think love should be unconditional. Yeah, so my point is like there's we can only take so much we can only see so many opportunities squander before we give up on you Yeah, but my whole point is we're willing we're putting in all this work when we all could easily leave we don't because we want to see you grow and succeed.

Sobia: And that's our feminine energy. I think that's where the care, the love, the nurturing, where I think we're willing to put the work in to see growth and others and to see other people and to see others thrive. I feel like I'm if it was if we had more of a masculine energy will be gone will be gone in an instant but I think having that feminine energy means we stay because we want to see that, want people thriving

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Kendi: and it's like no matter what I think I love PEI like PEI gave me safety, gave me space to grow into the person I am there's so many things. I have so much gratitude for this space, this community for I think it's more like even sometimes just like a short term, like almost like a toxic relationship where you're like I need you to work on you. Like you're the problem PEI need you to work on you. And honestly if Pei works on PEI baby. like you are my type PEI is my type you know I love the aesthetic here I'm like please do me a solid Okay, fix yourself so that we can be together you know, get some therapy like we can be living our best days but PEI is playing.

Sobia: PEI is a toxic man.

Kendi: A beautiful AF toxic man. I love looking at you, you hurt me

Amirah: like me having a toxic relationship with PEI,

Kendi: but it's PEI has a toxic relationship with us. Toxic man, I'm trying to make you whole here.

Amirah: So did we want to end with like local tips, for like Islanders who are like trying to do better and wanting to do better? My biggest one, and this is one that I've shared with a lot of people and this is tested, I've tested it. And this worked, is really being intentional with the type of media that I consume, whatever type, whatever, whatever is out there, whatever brand of media, whether it's like skincare, beauty, whatever is out there, there's a Black woman who's doing it, there's an Indigenous woman who's doing it, there's a brown woman who's doing it, and probably doing it twice as good. Those are the people that I listen to. Like so I constantly with the media that I consume, I constantly center the voices of particularly Black and Indigenous women. Because when we think of when, because there's the you know, the saying that when Black trans women have went Black trans women are liberated, and the whole world is liberated, because those are the people who are often at the bottom of like, society's totem pole. And so making a conscious and an active effort to really listen to the voices of those people, because there is a lot that like, could go, like they could go like past our heads like, I'm like I'm an able-bodied person, I do pass as a cis person. So there's a lot of privilege that is there. But when you centre the voices of people who are visibly trans people who are visibly disabled, and other marginalized people, there's so much you learn.

Amirah: And there's so much like and there was those voices help you realize we can be doing better. Because if I were in a different body, if I were like, in a man's body or a white body, I'm like, oh, like PEI's, fine. PEI's fine for you. You will specifically, you specifically, PEI isn't fun for a lot of other people. And so there's just like, there's also like constantly remembering that as individuals, there's constantly going to be gaps in our knowledge. And being comfortable with that sitting in your discomfort. Like I really do not know anything, I want PEI to be better. But I don't know everything about how PEI is better. I, there's so much there's so much to learn. And so like finding those gaps in your knowledge and really centering the voices of more marginalized people.

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Amirah: Because like socially, like we have like, like a lot of the information we consume now is like literally at our fingertips. Like it's your it's the people you follow on Instagram. It's the people you follow on Facebook. It's the people you watch on Tik Tok, it's the people you follow on Twitter, like all those types of things, because even when we talk about representation. And people are often like, well, there just isn't that many racialized or disabled people in the media, the media gives you what you want. So the more you consume content from racialized and disabled people, the more the media will, will give you that content. Something about supply and demand. I don't know economics, but I remember in high school, they told me something about supply and demand. So that's the thing if there is, increase in demand increases supply?

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah, good job.

Amirah: Girl Boss

Stephanie: For me, I'll add on to your bit about discomfort, I think it would be really great if people start being okay, with discomfort and having uncomfortable conversations, when problematic things come up, particularly with those close to you, it's really easy to kind of let it slide and not bring it up. But then those feelings get entrenched. So when you're able to have uncomfortable conversations with your neighbor, you're able to have uncomfortable conversations with your uncle with your cousins with your kids, whatever it is, it makes it eventually it builds and makes it socially unacceptable to act a certain way. And I think that's really important, because earlier on Sobia you mentioned, you know, there's some well intentioned people, but they're not meant to be decision makers. But if it becomes socially unacceptable be a type of way, the types of changes that we're pushing decision makers to make will be a lot simpler. And so we can't all change systems overnight, but we can choose the kinds of conversations we have, because I've heard a lot of disturbing things that my kids have been said to my kids at school, even as young as kindergarten. And so let's change the types of conversations we're having with each other. And let's not put our comfort at the center at the expense of others.

Kendi: Yeah, I'll build off what you said. Where I think those uncomfortable conversations have to start on your own. You know, like I think a lot of folks even I think it's that whole self love thing like the revolution starts with you. Where if say like you have a thought and it's a fatphobic thought. I think a lot of people just dismiss them they're like, oh my god don't think that right? But I think it's more so being like okay, why did I think that? Where is that coming from? Who taught me to think that? Okay, what happens next time, I think that? Like challenging it for yourself. And then I think you start to normalize challenging your own. Because if you can't even challenge your own biases, bro like, how you gonna get to be challenging someone else? Yeah. And once you get comfortable challenging someone else's, so like maybe it's a sibling or like a parent or somebody, then you can take that out into community, then you can take that out into systems. But like one of the things I really learned is like, what makes, like the revolution so hard is that it's an individual process first, you know. It's that I have to look at myself in the mirror, and be like, where do I carry these things of like social conditioning and harm.

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Kendi: And when more people start doing that, I think we'll start to see like, because I think that's like, the truest form of self love is like really knowing yourself, which means knowing why you think a certain way, or why you believe certain things, and then choosing how you want to move or how you want to think, right, like taking ownership and control of that of your own self, I think is the highest form of self love. And a lot of society is. I'm reading this book called propaganda right now, which is that's why I'm like saying this word a lot. But like, it's just like, we don't even know why we're doing the things we do. You know, if you ask someone, like, why do you do microaggressions? They have no idea. They just like what? I just grew up thinking that that's what your hair looks like, I can touch your hair. And it's just like, bro, like, yeah, Google Google a little bit like do start start looking at your own internal processes while you're doing certain things. And so that's my hope is that more of society just does their own, like radical revolutionary work, and it will trickle out into the rest of society.

Sobia: Yeah, I think for me, mine is directed more towards people in positions of power and who have decision making abilities. I think humility is really, really important, really important to be humble, truly humble, and to be okay, with accountability. One of the things that we often see is that people are scared to be held accountable or hold others accountable. Because while it might bring negative attention, or what if they sue us or whatever, whatever it's like, well be okay with that. It'd be you have to accept the negative attention, you have to. And we're told growing up, you have to accept the consequences of your actions. well, accept the consequences of your actions, be willing to do that and be willing to learn from it. People are going to be need to be held accountable. Maybe some people need to lose jobs, I don't know. But people in positions of power and those they need, they need to be willing to be held accountable to hold others accountable. Because until they do, those people will not have our trust. And it gets it's hard to build any sort of relationships with them, if they're not willing to show that they will listen to us and believe us because when they don't hold themselves or others around them accountable, and what they're basically the message they're sending us is that we don't believe you. A gaslighting the or even if they do, like, it's not that bad, whatever you're exaggerating, that destroys trust, trust that completely erodes trust. And once that trust is destroyed, it takes a lot of work to rebuild it.

Kendi: Can I ask you something? Because you said the consequences of their actions, they should be, we know that there's consequences for actions. Would you say to people in power that the consequences for their inaction is loss of trust and retention?

Sobia: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, inaction. It's not even like a loss of trust. Like they have to build trust, because the trust isn't there to begin with, right. We know are the systems the systems are racist, so the trust isn't there, but they have to build it so that inaction does nothing to build trust. Yeah. All right. Thank you for this conversation, everyone.

*Theme music comes up*

Fiona: Thank you so much to Sobia, Stephanie, Amirah and Kendi for creating space to share your experiences. If you're listening along and want support or want to learn how to be a better ally, go to BIPOC USHR's website. I'll link it the shownotes.

Speaking of appreciation, I want to thank Innovation PEI and Skills PEI for their support, along with our sponsors: Beyond the Brim Consulting, Upstreet Brewing, and Confederation Centre of the Arts.

Finally, shout out to Adam Gallant, who produced this amazing theme music. Thanks for joining and I'll talk to you next time on the hidden island!