

PodcastS3_RubySmithDiaz

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SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Ruby Smith-Diaz



Ruby Smith-Diaz 00:20

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams and I'm very glad you're here with me today. I love doing this podcast. I'm privileged to speak with people who are out in the world making a difference with their programs, their art, their activism. If you would like to support me in doing this work, you can do so for as little as \$3 a month by becoming a member of my Patreon community. You can go to [patreon.com slash Omkari Williams](https://patreon.com/OmkariWilliams) and sign up. There's also a link on my website omkariwilliams.com.



Omkari Williams 01:00

One of the things that I believe stops a lot of us from engaging in activism is the idea that we have to make a huge impact or that what we're doing won't really matter. I think that we should start our work with those we have proximity to, and make the difference we can right where we're planted. If it grows, excellent. If it doesn't, we've still made a difference, we've still had an impact. Today's guest is someone who's working where she is, and making a real difference in the lives of young people and adults. Ruby Smith-Diaz was born to Chilean and Jamaican parents in Edmonton, amiskwaciy, in so called Canada. She is the founder of Tierra Negra arts, an arts based anti-oppression facilitation business, as well as the founder of Autonomy Fitness, a body positive personal training business, inviting people of all sizes, genders and sexual orientations to learn the joy of moving. Ruby is also the curriculum developer and facilitator for Still Here Black histories and

futures in Canada, and has been busy facilitating it in classrooms in the lower mainland. I am so happy to welcome Ruby to the podcast. Hi, Ruby. Hi, how are you?

 Ruby Smith-Diaz 02:20
I'm doing well. Thank you so much for having me.

 Ruby Smith-Diaz 02:22
Oh, I'm really looking forward to this conversation. When I first came across your work I thought, this is interesting. I definitely need to have her on the show. So I'm glad it worked out. This is going to be fun.

 Ruby Smith-Diaz 02:34
Mm hmm. I think so.

 Omkari Williams 02:36
So I want to start with your training called Anti-Oppression From the Heart because when I saw that it really jumped out at me right away. Because I feel so strongly that our personal stories have to be connected to our anti-oppression journey and this particular program feels like it does exactly that. And I would love for you to talk about that. And why story is so important in this work?

 Ruby Smith-Diaz 03:07
Yeah, absolutely. So I offer the Anti-Oppression From the Heart workshop through my business Tierra Negra Arts, which is an art based facilitation training organization. And the reason that I decided to go this route in particular, with the title, but with the work itself was because I attended many workshops in my youth where I learned a lot of information about terms and what terms to use, what terms to not use, things to be considering. But I found that there was a really big disconnect between the theoretical the mental aspect of the work and, you know, my emotions that were coming up as a part of learning this. My experiences that weren't getting named in the room, and not really being able to, to hear other people's experiences either.

 Ruby Smith-Diaz 04:02

And what shifted this work for me was working with an organization called Partnership for Youth Empowerment. And they particularly work through the arts, to give people a route to connect to themselves. And I saw a really big intersection between this work of working with arts of connecting to the self, and also in this being a doorway, into connecting about the larger issues in the world from a really meaningful place and from an action oriented place. And so this is a model that I've adopted in my work because what happens often to anti-oppression work is when subjects come up that are challenging to us or that challenge our sense of being, oftentimes we experience a feeling of shame. Or freezing, or anger, or defensiveness, especially if there's somebody who's just walked into the room and is telling you how things are or is presenting a reality that is much different than yours.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 05:01

And so, for me, the foundation of the work I do comes in building trust with the group comes in creating art, and going through activities with each other. And it comes primarily also in building that trust so that we can actually share stories with each other. Because the biggest thing for me is understanding, and letting people understand, that we don't have the full picture on our own. There is no way that we can, you know, understand everything in the world simply from where we are standing and simply from our own life experiences. So, a big, a big portion of the shifts that happened for people is because they're able to connect with other people. They're able to actually take a moment and ask questions of themselves. And they're also able to take that foundational knowledge and understand their story a little bit better to understand also how they can shift the world around them both in their personal world, their interpersonal world, and also take action around the larger issues in their neighborhoods, in their city, and in their countries or internationally as well.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 06:06

I love what you just said, particularly the things that really stuck out for me, were what you were saying about feeling shame or guilt or just, you know, generally feeling badly about something that we have done and how that tends to make people freeze. Because one of the things I found in my own work is that when people get into looking at anti-oppression work from whatever perspective you're taking, as soon as shame comes up, everything shuts down. And you have to move past that or people are just not available for the conversation that is actually going to move us closer to a free world. And it's so interesting how that is our sort of reflexive response, is to feel badly. And I'm always trying to encourage people to just sit with the feeling, not make it mean anything, and be able to then move on and recognize we all have things we feel ashamed of or guilty about. But

those don't have to stop us. And that's one of the biggest challenges that I find. I don't know if that's something that you also experience.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 07:26

Yes, absolutely. And, and it's incredible how universal that feeling of shame is, and I and I mean, we can talk about this later. But I think Nora Samaran talks a lot about that, that aspect of shame and how it can prevent us from connecting with each other. But for me, it's like it's like a feeling that just swallows you alive. And for me, the biggest resource to be able to move past that has been essentially just to set yourself up well when entering this work and Mutima Imani, who lives in the bay, in alone and territories. She talks about like going into a workshop and resourcing yourself, which essentially means taking some time to make a list of physical list of things that will keep you connected to your body to the moment so that you can continue to stay in the room and continue staying here for the conversations that need to happen. Because once we leave those conversations, the work again rests often on those who have been pushed in the margins of our society, right. And it's not fair to those people, as well to have to sit in the conversation and to not have the rest of the folks in the room as well. So the idea is to return back, take your moments, right, take your moments to go for a walk to breathe, to maybe let some tears out, journal for a little bit. Do what you need to do, but return back to the conversation.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 08:56

Yeah, that's so important. I mean, even something as simple as if you choose not to physically leave the space because often you can emotionally leave the space and you know. But if you choose to stay in the space and are trying to reconnect emotionally to the space, something as simple as putting your feet on the floor, really consciously sort of grounding oneself can just help. But I really appreciate that idea of coming in with a list of ways so that when you're there and your brain stops functioning properly, all you have to do is read that piece of paper that you have in your pocket. And that can get you back to a place of being able to be fully engaged in the conversation that's happening. Because I think if we go in knowing that the conversation is going to be challenging, we're much more able to sustain the hard part's because we know what's coming. We're not surprised by it. And we just prepare for it, so I really appreciate that. I think that's very wise and I am going to adopt that going forward. So thank you.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 10:08

Yeah. And thank you for allowing me to share that. And I want to thank Mutima for sharing those practices with me too.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 10:15

Absolutely. And another aspect of the work that you do, because I think it really connects up here, is as a physical trainer, and you do it with a very specific focus. And I would love for you to talk about why you do your physical training work and why you feel it's so important for communities of color.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 10:36

Yeah, so I've had kind of an ongoing relationship with with working out and being physical with my body, probably from my late teens and moving onwards. And I have to be honest, so when I first started going into the fitness world, it was to be able to fit in to this really narrow Eurocentric cis hetero body image that was surrounding me. A little bit more about that, I grew up in a very, very white environment. So I grew up with my mom whose light skinned and Latina. And I went to a school where I literally was the only Black person growing up for elementary, junior high, and finally, in high school, that shifted a little bit.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 11:19

And so all of those thoughts around what my body should look like was formed by the environment that I was in, the media that I was taking in as well. And so when my teens hit, I just wanted to be and have the body that everybody said was the perfect one to have. And so my relationship to exercise initially became a very disordered one. And it wasn't actually until my early 20s when I started having very chronic pain, debilitating pain, where I actually had to rethink my relationship with my body and with movement and with exercise. It literally took me not being able to get out of bed to be able to start thinking about, okay, what are the things that my body can do today? And what are the ways that I can celebrate the things that I'm able to do today, even if it is, Hey, I got out of bed and I made it down the block without being in an incredible amount of pain.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 12:17

So it was my own body that was a big teacher for me. And I realized that I needed to stop pushing past the pain that I was experiencing while I was working out and I needed to stop pushing for these ideals that didn't actually fit me. So it was a big, it was a big journey. It was a big journey to, to sit with that to sit with those feelings of discomfort to begin to understand the ways that my brain had been programmed to believe that my body wasn't enough. And as I began to use exercise as a tool for healing for my body, I started thinking about the ways in which so many people didn't have a place, or a choice about how they were moving their bodies in the city and in the society at large. And how

focused it was in particular about weight loss, and how focused it was on, in addition to weight loss, but like weight loss being connected to success in life as well.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 13:19

So when I came back to Vancouver a few years ago, I was really determined to kind of create that space for people because I wasn't seeing it being represented. And I wanted to offer something to my community that I wish that I had had in my early 20s when I was seeing all these trainers just for one sole purpose. So that's what pushed me to start Autonomy. And that's what pushed me to start a practice that is rooted in radical self love. And I want to bring up the the work of Sonya Renee Taylor, who wrote this incredible book called, *The Body Is Not An Apology*, and she's been a huge mountain of inspiration for my work. Specifically connecting the ways in which, you know, moving our bodies is also deeply connected into these larger systems that push us to the margins of our society and that also cause harm to our bodies in so many different ways. So yeah, that's a little bit about that.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 14:17

Yeah, that's really interesting because I was the super skinny kid when I was growing up. And that was not acceptable either. You know, the, the range of what was ideal was so narrow and almost nobody fit into it, but the amount of energy and attention that went into trying to fit into it was absurd. And, you know, as a skinny kid and a skinny Black kid, there was always that awareness that no matter what I was never going to quite be it. It was never going to quite be enough. And I look at the kids I knew in school who were the other Black kids, the Hispanic kids, and all of us had this sort of this desperation to try and be something that we couldn't be, and so much time has been spent unlearning that. So I think it's really important for us to pay attention to those things so that we're not perpetuating these ideas for kids, especially young girls about what they should look like and what their body should be, and how their bodies should be moving through this world and just give them space to just be I think that's incredibly important because so much damage is done and so much time is spent on learning these very unhealthy lessons.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 15:50

Absolutely. And like connected in with that conversation also is so deeply connected our with our gender presentation with our gender identity and all of those conversations are so often erased from fitness spaces. It's simply like, if you're a woman, you have to look like this. And if you're a man, you have to look like this. And that's what's considered attractive and you're going to be successful if you look like that. But it doesn't leave room

for all of the multiplicity of identities in between and beyond of people in different ways that bodies can be right.



Omkari Williams 16:23

Yeah,



Ruby Smith-Diaz 16:24

Yeah. It's a really big responsibility. I think that we have as adults to, to work on that deprogramming to work on healing ourselves. And, and again, that work has to start with us. If we don't, if we don't do that work ourselves, it's really difficult to be able to share that message or to role model that behavior as well, to the younger generation.



Omkari Williams 16:49

It is and I think it's also really important that you connect it to our ideas of success because those are so patriarchal and so just rooted in white supremacy. To decouple what we look like from the work we do or the level that we attain in whatever work we do. And also just the way we look at the work we do and decide what we assign value to, and what we think is not that important, would really be a significant shift in how we all engage in the world. But that's something that only happens if we're very conscious about what we're putting out there, not only for ourselves, but also for the generations behind us. And I think that that's just an enormous challenge right now when the idea of success is so specific and so narrowly focused still. So, yeah, it just frustrates me it's like, hmm, especially during a pandemic, when all of a sudden you recognize who's really valuable.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 17:58

Absolutely. It's been really frustrating. I mean, I, unfortunately I have to spend a lot more time on social media and then what I would personally like because I do run my business. And that's my primary way of connecting with people. However, it's been pretty frustrating to see even though I filter out my Instagram quite a bit still such a big fear about gaining weight, and what are you going to look like after the pandemic. And it's like people, we are living, you are surviving a pandemic and still this fat phobia is so ingrained in us that that's our primary concern it seems like in a lot of spaces and and it does actually make me sick to see a lot of companies profiting off that and, and making slogans off of don't do this otherwise, you know, you're gonna you're gonna lose your body, you're gonna lose whatever it is that they're trying to market to you in order to

make their own gains.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 18:51

Yeah, it's sort of like instead of the freshman 15. Now we hear about the pandemic 15.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 18:57

Exactly.



Omkari Williams 18:58

you know, and that's just, well, anyway. But something that you said that made me think also about just the whole idea of nurturance and self care. So yeah, we have this pandemic. And we have companies that are trying to get us to do certain things because it will put more money in their pockets. And we're all trying to stay healthy in our own ways. But one piece of staying healthy beyond just the physical, the broadly physical, is self care. And it's something that you talk about in terms of how it's often denied to Black people. But it's also something we often deny ourselves. And I would really appreciate it if you would speak about that about your experience of Black people denying themselves self care, and what self care looks like beyond the physical realm.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 19:57

Yeah, it's a big question. And I honestly like I, I am constantly revisiting this question for myself. And it's interesting. I had a conversation actually with a very dear friend of mine the other day, and we were trying to figure out what is it that makes self care so difficult for us?



Ruby Smith-Diaz 20:21

And after a few minutes, we started realizing, well, you know, self care for a lot of the time is a learned behavior. And within our families, we never saw our primary caretakers ever modeled that behavior for us. was like a bomb had been dropped. I I started realizing that never in my life did I see either of my parents just taking it easy, just just relaxing, just doing anything for themselves. I remember my mom and I mean my mom is a Latina person, but that was my main role model. But her idea of relaxation was sitting on the couch, pulling out a bag of you know, clothes and socks that needed to be mended and watching TV at the same time.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 21:11

Never did I see my mom paint her nails, go to the spa, take a moment to meditate, sit in the park without thinking, it was it was literally all about that. And I and I started realizing Well, no wonder it's because a lot of the times the people that we have around us are also so deeply impacted by this culture that not only marginalizes us, but makes us work harder to make the same amount to survive as other people. And that's part of the key is that capitalism in particular and white supremacy also impacts us on a racial basis. So we know that on average, women, sis women earn less than than cis men. We know on average that trans people folks with disabilities earn less than folks who, you know, are considered cis, and folks who are considered able bodied. And we know that that white folks earn more than all those other racial categories as well.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 22:13

And so a big part of it is that we have to hustle we have to make things move. And often there is so little time for us. But then on the other side, I think there is like this notion that for Black folk in particular, that we have to show up when other people don't. And I think this is like very much ingrained to with I think, like a lot of Black folks feeling like they have to be the carriers have all of the emotional burdens of all of the other in between work, that doesn't get, you know, counted as part of your wage, but is part of your very existence.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 22:49

And so, with that in mind, I think being able to say no, is almost for me and in the way that I process it is almost like for me, so like, I don't care about those people, I'm going to I'm going to be selfish. And and you know, spend time on me only. And I think that's the note, the the piece that we have to disrupt and that I have to disrupt. And then I'm trying to learn to disrupt is that saying no to something or saying no to somebody isn't actually saying, you know, I don't care about you, or I'm being selfish. It's actually saying, I love myself, and I love you. And I'm taking care of myself well, so that I can be brighter and that I can be a support for myself and for my community, because it doesn't work if you're running on dry. And that has been the biggest piece for me that I'm still actively trying to learn.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 23:43

Yeah, it's so true. I think back as you were speaking, I was thinking back on my own family, and thinking about how rarely, I saw my mother just sit still and do nothing. You know, it's

there was, besides her work, there were kids and there was a husband and there was a home and just the notion of sitting still and doing nothing, although I will say in my family, we were all big readers. So we would sit and read, but even that, in some way, had a slightly self improvement aspect to this. So I'm not sure necessarily entirely counts as self care. But, you know, at least we did have that, and I appreciate that. But I think what you're saying is very true.



Omkari Williams 24:38

And I think especially for Black women who have long been put into the position of sustaining the family and the community and the church, and just all of these other societal structures, that the notion of self care is one of those, "Well, I'll put it on my list, but I don't think I'm going to get to it anytime soon" kind of things. And shifting that is really going to be an important change. And it means that other people have to do stuff too, which is not going to kill anybody. So I'm totally down for that. But to get other people to pick up the slack, to get men to pick up some of the slack has been an ongoing challenge, and one that we haven't completely addressed very well yet, as we see, again, in the pandemic, where women are still the primary caretakers for kids even when they have a full time job. And I'm not sure how that's supposed to work. But yeah, something that I've been thinking about and wanted to ask you about is because of this pandemics, I've been really thinking a lot about a different context for the future because people will say things like oh when things go back to normal. And I'm thinking, "No, no, no, no", we don't want things to go back to normal. We want things to be different because we are seeing what normal looks like and where normal does not work. And something that you have created that I really appreciate, are your Afrofuturism cards. Because with those, you are essentially imagining a different context for the future. So tell us about them and what they're intended to do.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 26:32

Yeah, so the Afrofuturism trading card project started around 2014. Actually, it was inspired by a period actually of deep grief and mourning, specifically in I hate saying like the words like uptake or a surge in the death and the killing of black folks, but a more heightened visibility period of that, in particular, when a young couple were actually shot to death. While they were sleeping in their car, and I had such a deep grief about it to really process that in my body, to know that it seems that for this world that we live in, in the in the global north, were seen as a threat in every aspect of our lives, even if even if we're sleeping in our cars, right?

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 27:24

And as I moved through that grief, I started thinking about, okay, I'm processing this as an adult, and I have the resources to talk to the counselor to reach out to other people around me about it, to understand it to let go of it to move through it. But what are the young people experiencing? How are they holding this? What kind of legacy or what kind of inspiration is being left for them? If we see Black death is such a constant in our lives, especially in the media and I guess to set more context as well, where I live, which is in Vancouver, the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh nation.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 28:08

Black people here make up a 1% of the population. And so we don't see each other all that often. And in many of the rituals that I feel connected to you in terms of meeting with other people and connecting with other Black folks, in particular, when something so horrific happens, when I have such a desire to do that, it is a lot more difficult to do that in a place like this. And so I wanted to create a space and also a project where young Black people could come together and create a vision of the future for themselves. And so the Afrofuturism trading card projects invites Black youth to get together to think about and to understand what Afrofuturism is, and to also place themselves within it and so on.

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 29:00

They are tasked with the creation of one or two cards that represents themselves in the future with healing powers. And so we go through a process of talking about, okay, what are some of the things in the world that make you hurt, that makes you sad? And what do you think would be like an antidote? If you could bring anything to the table to heal that, what kind of power or ability would it be? And we are able to transform that a little bit so that they can feel empowered, and maybe some of the gifts that they have already in this present moment to help combat that. And the part that makes it really fun and exciting for both me and them is the part where we actually get to do photos of themselves.

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 29:46

And so we gear up, I bring, you know, like crowns, I bring wands, I bring pieces of clothing. They're invited to bring pieces of clothing or crystals and stuff from home. We do a photo and then they're able to actually use their own image and create a trading card for the future, using you know, mixed media materials, magazines, pieces of you know, like crystals or glitter or things that resonate with them to create this image of themselves.

And for me presenting Afrofuturism to young people is just so critical because for hundreds of years, we've been denied the ability to determine our own futures. And that's something that we talk about in the workshop is that, you know, essentially from the creation of the papal bull in the 1400s, that dictated, you know, European christianized kings have the right to dominate, to steal bodies to take land, to enslave us for perpetual time. All of that, were decisions that impacted us and that determined our ability to determine our future. So what does it look like to take that decision making power? back? What does it look like to actually create our own vision of who we want? Want to be in create a vision of the world that we want to live in?

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 31:04

Wow! Really! Wow, that's just amazing. I can't even imagine how much fun that must be to start with. And then to walk out and have created your future for yourself in some in some way. That's just genius. I just love that. That's so... it really gives me chills to think about what that means because kids get to just say, you don't get to tell me who I am or what I'm going to be. I get to decide that and I get to actually create my own vision for the future and support other kids in doing the same and I really, really love that. So thank you so much for that and where can people see that? Is there somewhere where they can see that project?

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 32:06

Not yet. They are carefully stored in my home right now. But I hope to be developing a little bit more of a gallery on my website tierranegraarts.ca. In the future here in the coming months.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 32:20

Okay, well, I will put it in the Episode Notes and people can look back and check in with you from time to time to see if it's there yet, because I think it's going to be amazing when it shows up. Thank you. Oh, yeah, no, thank you. So it's sort of in the context of that whole thing. One of the things that I think is very interesting, to me anyway, is that a lot of people in the US believe that Canada doesn't have a problem with racism the way the United States does. And I don't think that's actually true. I would like to get your take on the experience of racism in Canada where I mean, in Vancouver, as you say, Black people are 1% of the population, which is means you can go a whole day and not see anybody who looks like you.

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 33:23

Yeah, I think that is a very, very common myth that we don't have a race problem here in Canada. And I mean, I think it has also very old roots, and there's a lot to unpack here to figure out where's the best place to start. One of the things that landed most for me around this is through the work of Robin Maynard, who wrote a fantastic book called, *Policing Black Lives*. And she is a writer from Canada and specifically focuses on the history of slavery to policing in what we now know as Canada.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 34:01

And one of the things that she mentions actually was, I believe the period was around the 1940s and 50s, where a lot of Canadians were taking in the news of, you know, what was happening the United States in regards to things like lynchings in regards to segregation in regards to, you know, the civil rights movement starting to get organized and all of that. And what got broadcasted up here was the clear message that the United States has a race problem in Canada in its formation, wanted to see how do we avoid a race problem, like the one in the United States, and apparently large segments of the population were pooled at this time. And the understanding at that time was that the best way to have Canada avoid a race problem would be to not have one in the first place. Meaning to actively ban the immigration of Black people or people from the African diaspora into Canada so that we wouldn't have a race problem in the first place.

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 35:10

And this to me, like blew my mind, because it seems like an argument that, you know, a little kid in grade six or grade seven would would make to avoid something like this. But it also erases, you know, the notion that we don't have a history of Black oppression in particular in Canada before this time period. I mean, very few people know and the government of Canada actually only recognize it in this year that Canada has a history of slavery. And it looks a lot different than what happened to the United States because we didn't have things like plantations, a lot of the times due to climate, but we did have a vast population of folks that were brought up as slaves working in upper and lower Canada known now as Quebec, and also Ontario and also in the eastern portions of Canada. So these are histories that because they've been actively excluded, kind of generate the notion that like, "Oh, well, you know, we didn't have slavery therefore, how could we have a problem as serious as what's happening or what's happened in the United States?".

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 36:14

But a large part of that is through our ignorance of actually knowing our history. And a big part of also, that argument being extremely problematic too, is that it also denies us the opportunity to actually correct the situations of harm that still to this very day, have drastic negative implications for Black communities living in Canada. And that is when we look at things like for example, again, when we look at who makes most money in this country, Black people in almost every single province make on average less than their white counterparts.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 36:52

It also is reflected in for example, how many Black communities don't have quality access to health care because of their income levels, because they're not believed about their conditions by doctors. It also is reflected in our numbers around policing, specifically carding practices, in also in officer involved fatalities. So in encounters with police, Black people are more likely than almost every single other other counterparts to end up dead in encounters with police across every single province. The only other group where we are matched or maybe surpassed by are actually by Indigenous people. And this is a really key thing to consider is that we have a serious problem of anti Indigenous racism in Canada as well, that has been actively denied because we'd like to promote it as a multicultural country, a country that promotes specific aspects of Indigenous culture, or cultures.

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Ruby Smith-Diaz 37:48

But we actually like to politely tiptoe around the fact that land here in many areas has never actually been ceded, has never actually been given up. It's never actually been signed over by anyone. And so what are the tensions that exist there? And how do those actually connect also into the project of colonialism that connects as well with this project of slavery and the enslavement of Black people as well as Indigenous people here in this country. So for me, it is a huge problem of race that we have that we'd like to look to our neighbors in the south and point our fingers out there so that we don't actually have to address the problems that are happening in our own backyard, so to speak.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 38:34

That is so interesting. I knew some of that history, but I did not know all of it. And I think that one of the things that is going to happen now is there is a reckoning that's coming and I don't think it's going to be as easy for people on either the Canadian or the US side of the border to ignore that and to suppress it in the ways that it's been ignored and

suppressed in the past. And I think that the shift in dynamic is going to be profound. And it's really it's going to take time, I have no illusion that it's going to happen quickly. But I think that energy and that movement and things like Afrofuturism trading cards, and the conversations that are being had are all going to move us in that direction. So even though the history is very ugly, I actually hold out some hope now for moving past that into a society that is actually an equitable society for all its members. So fingers crossed. Anyway, I like to stay hopeful.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 39:49

And I think we I just want to add, I think we all have that responsibility to have learning these histories, teachers in particular who are part of educating the next generation This is not currently reflected in the curriculum in British Columbia. And there is a huge responsibility to learn about it ourselves on our own time, so that the next generation doesn't come up not knowing that the land that they're on is stolen and not knowing that the land that they're on has also had slavery of Black and African descended people.

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 40:21

I completely agree. I was a history major in college and the amount that I did not learn about American history exceeds what I did learn, and so much of it was not accurate. And it is on us to educate ourselves and to do that work and to have the conversations and ask the questions. So I appreciate your bringing that up, because I think it's very important. If we don't know what's happened, there's no way to address it in a meaningful, substantive way. So thank you for that. Yeah. We're almost out of time. And I would like you to do something for me, which is I ask my guests to give the listeners three actions to take that will advance some of the subjects we touched on in this conversation. So what are three things that you would suggest that our listeners could do if they want to make a difference in this, in any of the areas we spoke of?

R

Ruby Smith-Diaz 41:23

Yeah, for sure. The first one that I would say is to, if you have Instagram, which most people do have, go ahead and detox your Instagram feed. And what I mean by this is actively going through the pages that after you view them make you feel like you are less than, make you feel that you need to change to, you know, be pretty, to be handsome to have that level of success that you'd ever wanted. I want you to go ahead and unfollow that. Because all of this leaves an imprint in our psyche. All of it leaves an imprint in our brain, and in our behaviors, and it's really important that we actually take the time and bring that back into our control. And to also begin the work of deprogramming our brain

by having less exposure to all these negative messages. Follow the stuff that makes you feel good. That's the first one.



Omkari Williams 42:17

Cool.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 42:18

Second one. I want folks to really read the work of Sonya Renee Taylor, she wrote the book that I mentioned earlier, in this interview, called, *The Body Is Not An Apology*. And for me, this book intersected the work of anti-oppression, and the work of body liberation all into one. She works with a term called body terrorism, which to me kind of put all of the pieces together to understand how the larger systems land, specifically on the body. So Sonya Rene Taylor, *The Body Is Not An Apology*.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 42:50

And the last one is related to self care into creating time for ourselves. And it is something that I've been doing for the last few months and it's to leave your phone on airplane mode, from the time we go to bed, until the time that you've gotten up eating breakfast and are fully ready to start your day. This is time to allow your brain to reset, to give ourselves time, specifically as Black folks, to connect with yourself about what it is that you want to accomplish for that day, how it is that you are feeling for that day. And if there's anything that you need to do for yourself before having to respond to whatever else is happening outside in the world. And that to me has been a hugely important practice in terms of reclaiming my own time. And again, attending to my own needs so that I'm ready for whatever presents itself to me for the rest of the day.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 43:46

I can tell you right now, I can hear people's heads exploding at that last one. But it's actually a practice that I do a variation on and it really has helped. I do not look at my phone first thing in the morning I used to I mean, that was I'd wake up and my hand would hit the phone and I'd be scrolling. And I've stopped doing that. And it's really shifted my experience of the day. So I second that wholeheartedly, and don't @ me about this, folks. I'm not going to give this one up.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 44:20

Yeah. And I also I would just want to say, too, I understand that there's some people in circumstances where medical emergencies, things like that they need to be on call, but in terms of your social media feed, and responding to text, just ignore them.



Omkari Williams 44:35

They'll still be there.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 44:36

They'll be there.



Omkari Williams 44:37

Exactly. Well, this has been such a wonderful conversation, Ruby, I am so glad that we got to speak. Thank you so much.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 44:46

You're welcome. It was my pleasure.



Omkari Williams 44:49

And I hope that we get to see the afrofuturism cards very soon. So because I'm really looking forward to those.



Ruby Smith-Diaz 44:56

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 44:58

So thank you all so much for watching. listening. And please be sure to visit Tierra Negra Arts. And if you're able to support Ruby's work, please consider doing so. As we continue to figure out how to navigate this new reality that COVID has dumped on us. The thing we can fall back on is community, both in person Well, sort of, and virtually. So really, however you do it stay connected to those who feed you, because they will also help you stay

connected to yourself. I'll be back with another episode of Stepping Into Truth very soon. And until then, remember that change starts with story. So keep sharing yours.