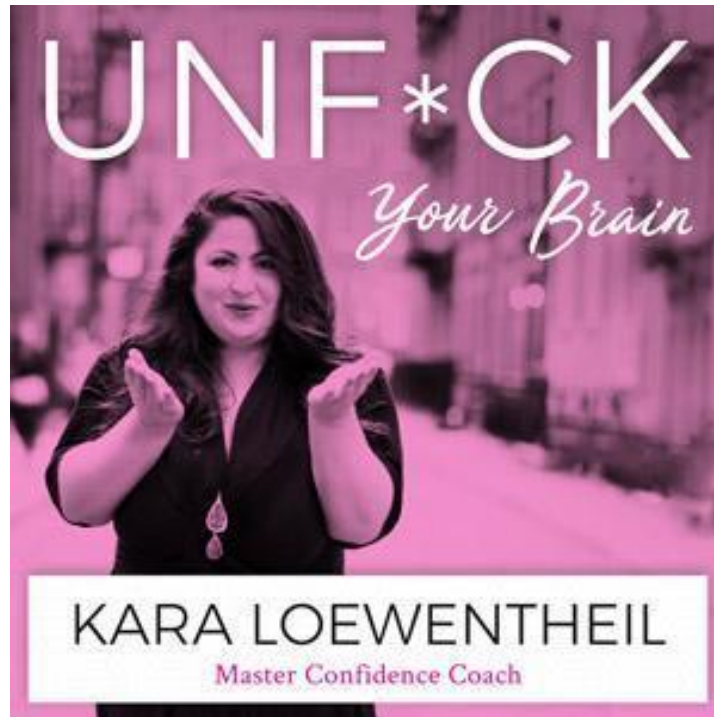


UFYB 299: Black Girls, Religion, Soft Life & Romance Novels: A Conversation with EbonyJanice



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *UnF*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, students. These are your morning announcements. Did you know that Feminist Summer School is now in session? It's true. Feminist Summer School is a thing. We've created it. It's going to be way more fun than summer school might sound to you. Although, honestly, I was the kind of nerd in high school who also liked summer school. But Feminist Summer School is going to be incredible.

It is happening inside The Clutch during the entire month of August. If you join the Clutch by July 31, 2023, you get to enjoy special bonus trainings and classes from our Clutch coaches on fun, joy, pleasure, and how to have an amazing summer that aligns with your feminist values, helps you experience more relaxation, ease and pleasure without all of that guilt and shame that the patriarchy tries to instill in us.

It will teach you how to ride that breezy summer feeling all year long, using your mind. We've all heard summer's a state of mind. And that is a state of mind that you can learn to create all year long. Having fun, relaxing, resting, playing, experiencing fun and joy and pleasure.

Those are things that are your birthright and that the patriarchy teaches you and socializes you to fear, feel guilty about, or ruin with your own brain. We are going to undo all that bullshit damage. We are going to have incredible trainings. We're going to have fun challenges. We're even going to have recess because we love a theme and we commit. So I would love to have you join us for Feminist Summer School. Inside The Clutch again, all during the month of August. You just need to join the clutch by July 31st in order to participate. To get the link, text your email address to +1 347-934-8861.

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You don't need a code word or anything, you'll just get the link straight away. Again, text your email to +1 347-934-8861 or you can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/summer. I can't wait. Get your cutest bikini, get that SPF, get a frosty drink and let's get down.

Alright, hello, my chickens, welcome. I am so excited for this conversation. I get a lot of pitches for the podcast and my PR person [inaudible] and then I saw this one, I was like, "Yes, immediately, let's go. I want to talk about this." So I am here with EbonyJanice. So she has an amazing new book called *All the Black Girls are Activists: A Fourth Wave Womanist Pursuit of Dreams as Radical Resistance*. I was like, "If the internet had tried to put together a title that would make me want to talk to somebody, that was going to be like, this is the only pitch I've ever gotten with womanist, in the title."

And I was like, "Yes, let's talk about it." So I am going to let EbonyJanice tell us a little bit about herself. Tell us what you think we should know about you and kind of how you came to write this book.

EbonyJanice: Yeah. I am EbonyJanice and I do go by EbonyJanice. And I am a Black girl whisperer, which is basically all of my work is just centering Black women and girls because I feel like I should be centered. I have historically had an experience where wherever it was that I was or whatever I was doing, that I was centered as the authority, that I was centered as the person that should be being considered. And so my life's work is that, is to center Black women and Black girls.

And the beauty of that is that when Black women and Black girls are well, then everybody else is taken care of. And I always include that part of the spiel because we live in an anti-Black society. So people can sometimes feel some kind of way about what do you mean you center to Black women and girls? So yeah, that feels very important to who it is that I am. I have a

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degree in political science and cultural anthropology and a Master's of Art in social change, with an emphasis on spiritual religious leadership, which sounds made up but it's a real thing.

Kara: I'm a life coach so nothing, I went from being a law professor type to a life coach so nothing sounds made up.

EbonyJanice: Yeah, I was tickled by it when I first saw it. I was like, "Is this a scam? Is this just about to be a little certificate at the end of this?"

Kara: We printed this out at Kinko's, congratulations.

EbonyJanice: Yeah, paying this grad school, Berkeley amount of money and they're just going to give me a certificate that says, you talked about justice. But no, it's a real thing. And I'll just introduce that to the conversation as well because my life's work, like I said, has been centering Black women and girls. But I've been deeply invested in the politics of humanity and thinking about things from a super scientific kind of, you know, anthropology is science but also a deeply spiritual background. And so I feel like that's the cutest little intro to who it is that I am.

Kara: I like it. You've already touched on so many things I want to talk about. First of all, just the fact that certainly Black people, other marginalized people, women always have to frame any ask for themselves as being like, "It'll be good for everyone." And I have this too even in trying to speak to women about why it's important to fill their own cup. I always have to be like, "Listen, your cup actually just matters because it's your cup but yes, also you will show up in more patience as a mom or whatever."

So I just like even that container that we have to do that in is such a sign of how we're socialized that women and other marginalized people, and

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especially I think Black people in America are socialized even to ask for any focus on you, you have to be like, "It's going to be good for everybody."

EbonyJanice: Everybody will be fine, yeah. No, it's a practice for me to not include that from time. But I also see the importance of it and the value of it because I'm not interested in really talking to allies or trying to convince people to become allies, but it does feel important to say, "Listen, your actual liberation is bound up in mine." And so you don't have really the privilege even of turning your eyes or your ears away from these kinds of conversations because you're not even all the way free yet. You're not even all the way well yet.

Kara: Right. It is true, what you're saying is true, that it is better for everybody. It's also just so striking that we have to preface it with that.

EbonyJanice: Yeah, it is.

Kara: I'm already off my list of questions because there's so much to be said. I would love to talk about this authority because I feel like this is something that I teach and work on a lot on how damaging it is and how insidious it is that women and marginalized people and people of color are socialized to not see themselves as an authority even on their own lives. And when you make a list of all the things that women are told, they don't know how to do for themselves. It's like what to wear, what to eat, what hair looks good for your face, what lip color should you be wearing. How do you parent, when should you eat? Should you exercise, how much?

Before you get out the door in the morning, there's 50 things you've been told you literally can't decide for yourself. So I'd love to hear you talk about how you see that specifically reflected for Black women and girls and kind of how to start shifting some mindset stuff around that.

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EbonyJanice: I used to write poetry all the time, I still write poetry sometimes. But I used to be a performance poet. And so I was writing a lot more often but I would be in these spaces with poets whose metaphors and similes and they were just so brilliant. And I was like, "When I say the sky is blue, I just mean the sky is blue." I wasn't even being deep. That really is, I'm just a storyteller, I'm just going to tell it the way that I see it and experience it. And so that is inside of even my teaching. My teaching is just very literal.

There is deep theory and practice that is surrounding it, but it's just very literal. And so one of the things that's been very profound for me in my own growth journey and my own learning journey is to just have language for something sometimes. It isn't even necessarily getting deep into the actual theory, it's just here's the language for it. And so when you know when you have the language for the fact that society is this androcentric, white male centered society and that it is intentionally built and designed that way.

How profound is it for you to just know that, to just know this was not thinking about me when it was created and it's still not thinking about me. And in fact everything that it is is thinking about a way to support and to benefit this one particular group of people or this one particular idea. And that, that really is kind of the breakthrough for me around authority is this question of, actually did we vote and say that white men were in charge? Because I didn't get to participate in that vote. And if other people decided that that's what they wanted to do, I want to divest from that.

I want to divest from the idea that what I look like is bound up in this one particular group of people's ideas of what is beauty and what is good and what is necessary and what is worthy. I'm divesting from that. I don't agree with that. And so I'm not in agreement with anymore. And so we go down the list of all the things that you just mentioned and are all the things that is a part of our socialization. Just having the language to realize that

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somebody decided that this is who was in charge, that these were the standards, that this is how you can become credible.

And all these years later in a lot of ways, we've continued to participate in it because of how deep our indoctrination is into those ideas. But to know it and then to question every single thing about it like, "Wait, do I agree with this? Is this really what I believe about myself?" I had this season of my life where my thighs were a thing for me. My friends would be like, "You never wear shorts." And I'd be like, "I would only wear shorts if I could wear pantyhose under my shorts because my thighs just are doing too much."

But then I would look at Erykah Badu's thighs or I would like see these other beautiful women's thighs that were thighs just like my thighs. And I would be like, "That's good, my thighs aren't good." How are they the exact same thighs but these thighs are not good? And so it really was just having that, again, just the literal, the sky is blue, the thighs are good, that really helped me to be like, "This is silly. This is silly that I'm hating this portion of myself or me, but not on other beings." And I just don't want to participate in that anymore.

And so it's just this consistent kind of reprogramming every time I catch it. I'm like, "That doesn't make sense, EbonyJanice. I would like to opt out of that." And over and over and over again, it's not perfect. It's not a perfect plan. But it's just the knowing of it that I didn't actually agree. I just was told to agree. And I have been actively participating in that because of my indoctrination. And now I want to reprogram my mind to think something else. To think that these are good thighs, that this is a good body, that this is a good experience that I'm having, that this is a worthy skin etc., etc.

Kara: I love it. I mean, first of all, I love the word 'androcentric', which I haven't been using but I'm going to start using. So good. But I also love what you're saying, I mean I think a lot of my work is about that, is like that,

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is similar in the sense of I think what has been missing for a lot of people is I understand the theory or the theory might be helpful intellectually. What am I doing with that on the day when I hate my thighs and I don't want to wear shorts? It's understanding that patriarchy exists is not helping me feel confident.

But what you're saying is, first of all, just bringing that awareness, looking at how often you're questioning yourself, how often you are deferring. I think we're so socialized to question our own experiences and our own perceptions of the world and how much we see. I mean I see this even in myself. I am the CEO of a multimillion dollar business. But when I think about who's the CEO of a multimillion dollar, I see a 45 year old white guy named Chad who's playing golf. That's my mental image, even though literally, it's me, I am one.

So that's sort of, I mean I love what you're saying and I think that is something we talk about on this podcast a lot is the simple thoughts, the simple repetition.

EbonyJanice: Over and over again though.

Kara: Over and over again.

EbonyJanice: And having these conversations is really important for people who are doing the work and may be one step ahead of you on your journey, to say to you, "It was hard to get to this step." Because sometimes particularly, I call it a little self-help pamphlet, particularly, you're reading a little self-help pamphlet and you think step one. And then you do that and it's easy. No one knows it's hard to get from step one and step two. It's this consistent, I'm 40 years old, so think about me having a revelation of something at 40 and thinking that tomorrow I'm not going to be doing that anymore. I'm 40 years in the game at this.

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So I have to be, you know, I fall down. I say really awful things to myself and about myself sometimes. James Baldwin says the house is on fire. We've all inhaled the smoke. Even the things that I don't believe about myself, I participate in it because this house is on fire. I've inhaled the smoke. So I can say on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and Saturday, "I love myself. I'm the greatest to ever do it." And then Sunday morning I'm like, "I'm ashy and no one likes me."

And it doesn't make any sense, but I'm 40 years into my idea and I have to just continue to practice it. And it is good for me and I think it is good for others when we're honest about the fact that this journey is not easy and it's not overnight, but it's certainly worth it.

Kara: Oh, my God, yes, you're singing my song. I'm Always like, "This is going to feel terrible for a while. It's going to feel a little bit better at first, just a little bit. You've got to keep going." So can you talk a little bit about, one of the things we also, I think, talk about quite a bit here is what is actually wellness culture and what is actually transformative? And you talk in the book, you say you can't Manny petty yourself into freedom. So you talk about wellness for Black women and girls and what the kind of narrative is about that and what's problematic about it.

EbonyJanice: Yeah. There is this movement right now for Black women in general called soft life. Black women want and deserve a soft life. And I don't disagree with it. Soft life, me down to the ground, get back up and work it all down. But it's really also being conflated in a lot of ways with luxury living and that is privileged language. It's just everybody can't five star resort their life. Everybody can't luxury spa. Everybody can't, Chanel, Gucci bag. Everybody can't take a month vacation to Bali.

And while I do think that those are all worthy aspirations because if that's a thing that you want then that's perfectly fine. But it's not going to actually

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regulate your nervous system, long term. It's not going to actually help you be a more seated version of yourself. It's not going to give you satisfaction, long term. And I hate to perform poverty, but I'm from poverty. That certainly is my background, my upbringing. I'm from working class, certainly, parents but if there was the bottom of the working class, ultimately.

And coming from this background and now finally, at this point of my life, being in a place where I do have privilege of access to resources and the very least \$27 in my bank account whenever I need it to be there. I look at this place where I do feel comfortable. I'm doing quote fingers, 'comfortable financially' to be able to say, if I wanted to take a vacation tomorrow, I could take that vacation. And with that, there's a version of me who used to think if I had more money, then I would be happier.

And then I got to my highest dream money goals and I met them and I was sitting there in that day like, "Wait a minute, life is a raggedy bitch."

Kara: I'm such a letdown, you've got everything you want and you're like, "God damn it, I'm still me."

EbonyJanice: And it's still me. I'm still sitting right here with my little self and what am I going to do with this? And so even having those kind of conversations with my closest friends and my contemporaries who hadn't necessarily reached that level of financial success at that point. It's still, it's impossible, and I'm certain that just hearing a little bit, knowing a little bit about your own work and your own journey that no one believes you when you say.

Kara: Yeah, [crosstalk] themselves.

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EbonyJanice: No one believes you when you say that money didn't fix it. And in fact, there are a lot of things, just maneuvering through my own family stuff that there were issues in my family that I thought if I could do this and support my family in this way, financially, everything will be good. And then nothing was good. I mean, the mortgage was paid and people have food to eat. And so I don't want to minimize that, that wasn't good, but the stuff, the thickness of it, the heaviness of it, was still sitting right there.

And I was sitting there, six figures down [crosstalk] about these things. Wait, money didn't fix it. This is wild. And so I feel like that story of soft life is a very beautiful thing to aspire to. But I have introduced, particularly in this book, *All the Black Girls are Activists* that I wrote, I've introduced the language of softness with the more in depth, the definition of what softness particularly for Black woman and girls would look like and would feel like. And it's really again about a regulated nervous system or regulating nervous system ongoing.

That I'm not always existing with this level of anxiety or with fear or with trepidation or feeling like I need to get up. I call it being seated, meaning, what does it feel like when you're actually fully seated in yoga. There's this particular posture where you're all the way down and you're on your butt.

Kara: Right. Your tail bone's down on the ground.

EbonyJanice: And you're completely there and your shoulders are down. What would it look like and feel like if we got to exist and create and imagine and dream from that place? Versus from this place of resistance or preparedness for fight or for struggle or for hustle. And so I'm wondering, inside this book, I'm contemplating this, I'm getting some supporting stories that I've experienced on my own. And suggesting that there is the work of wellness is certainly a part of our resistance, not just that my nails are done and that I got a good facial today, which is important. Do those things.

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But also that I've done the work to know what my home frequency feels like, to know what it feels like when I am fully seated version of myself. So any time I'm triggered from that place or any time something attempts to trigger me from that place, I can recognize it. And I have tools to bring me back to my seat. And that is what soft living feels like for me, it feels important, this wellness journey, this actual, I want to actually get to be EbonyJanice seated and not EbonyJanice, that's always in hustle, panic, grind, run, go, fight mode.

And that is a conversation around justice is a very real thing because there are groups of people who get to exist in their vulnerability, and that vulnerability isn't used against them. But those of us who have been marginalized in very violent ways and stories that are created about who it is that we are, we don't get to exist from that place. So the decision to exist there and to do that work and to invite people into that reality is certainly radical and revolutionary.

Kara: Yeah, there's so, I've been taking notes, there's so many things I want to talk about from what you said. And just first of all, 100%, amen to all of it. I think I came from the opposite end of, I mean not fabulously wealthy, but we had plenty of money, comfortable. And my family wasn't insanely wealthy, but because my grandfather was a doctor and he was the Dean of NYU Medical School, he knew a lot of insanely wealthy people. And if you grow up around that, you're like, "Money does not make you happy."

And obviously being able to take care of your basic needs is super important for nervous system stabilization like food, shelter, of course. But you can be on that month long vacation to Bali and if you married someone who doesn't really respect you and who you don't really love because society told you, you had to get married and you're stressed out the whole

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time about how you look in your bathing suit. That's not soft. You're not having that experience.

I have not yet been able to articulate this in a way that I feel like really gets it, but there's something about the irony of capitalism is what teaches us that money is the most important thing. And then there's something that happens, and I say this as somebody who was a social justice and a social justice person. And I was a reproductive rights litigator before I became an academic. So from within, as somebody who that was my whole identity for a long time.

There's something that happens around the fixation around money as the sort of problem and solution to everything that feels like it's actually replicating what capitalism is teaching us, which is that money is the main thing. As opposed to what you're talking about, which is what is true wellness? What's the point of all of this if you are in a stress response all the time?

EbonyJanice: I think that's the point of capitalism, this institution, this idea, it's so brilliant that it even tricks us. I've been in a romance novel era, it's the only thing I'm doing with my life.

Kara: Reading or living or writing?

EbonyJanice: Reading, a little bit but not fully in my romance novel era. I'm working on it. But, no, reading romance novels. And it's funny because I come from this anti racism education background and the only thing I was reading was critical race theory and oppression. And then I casually joked about, I can't wait till I'm just reading romance novels and thug passion all day long. And then a couple of years later, I know what happened, but that's a podcast for another day.

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I just rolled over into my romance novel era and I was like, “The only thing I want to do with my life is read romance novels.” Why did I go there? I don't even know why I got there? It's just my life's work is to bring romance novels into every conversation now. But no, I'm saying that because leaning over into talking about it so much more, talking about romance novels, everybody's like, “When are you going to write a romance novel?” That is how insidious capitalism is.

Kara: You feel like monetize your enjoyment, yeah.

EbonyJanice: Yeah, you've got to do something with this. You've got to turn this into something. And I'm like, “I just want to read it.”

Kara: I like to eat good food. I don't want to work in a restaurant.

EbonyJanice: Yeah. But there's nothing, you can't even enjoy anything. Even when people see you just enjoying something, there's something that is programmed in us to think, how can I make this something and not that there's anything in our lives that is just for us? It's not for anything else. It's not for anybody else. This is literally just for me. At some point I may actually do something with romance novels because I really am in my romance novel era, it's a real, real thing. I may talk about it publicly more consistently, I may.

I love learning about the history particularly of Black romance and I love it. I really have been enjoying it. But more than anything, I've just been enjoying it. And so, but I think that that again, that is the brilliance of capitalism. As this global power is like do something, commodify this. How do we turn this into something? How can we make this benefit other people and not just that, our wellness, what does it look like and what would it feel like? It goes back to the beginning of conversation.

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What if our wellness was just for us? What if this was just about me? What if I wasn't trying to get well so that I could heal generations of my family? What if I was just trying to get well so that I could just be well? The benefit is other people are well when I'm well, but the benefit also is and first is, I'm well and I'm well.

Kara: That's so important because otherwise you're just replicating what society does, which is treat you as a utilitarian function of serving other people.

EbonyJanice: How can you benefit us?

Kara: Yeah, so good. I have to say I think I had some skepticism about romance novels because of my own shit, because of the socialization I got around, in my life dating was always the thing I had the most trouble with and all the socialization around that. So it makes you think that romance and sex are the most important things in the world blah, blah, blah. And then I actually saw a tweet that blew my mind. It's not often Twitter gives me a feminist awakening, I feel like I did a lot of studying to get here.

But I saw a tweet that was, of course, romance novels are disparaged because it's a book that's predictable where happy things happen to women. Whether or not being murdered and brutalized for high art or it's just nice, you know it's going to work out, and she's going to get laid and live happily ever after.

EbonyJanice: Which is the good life, which is what I was [crosstalk].

Kara: The soft life I want.

EbonyJanice: Absolutely. And it really, it seems so silly but the reason why I got into the romance novel era is because I actually was coming to the

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end of a very beautiful relationship. There was no drama. He just was moving to a country that the US wouldn't even give me a visa for. So he's moving back home where he's from originally. And to keep my heart soft, I accidentally happened upon, I was randomly in Paris at the time, all of the stories are random. So I will keep it very brief.

Kara: So this feels like a romance novel. You're in Paris, your lover has to leave.

EbonyJanice: No. His move is so dramatic, honestly. He's a French speaking Black man. It's just the most dramatic story ever, it really is. There was crying on the corner of Rue Saint-Dominique.

Kara: Obviously there's a beautiful building in the background.

EbonyJanice: Really, it's a true story. So he leaves, he goes back to his country. And I'm in Paris for the month and I'm supposed to be writing a book at the time. And I'm just like, "I want to write this book." I just want to read about love. So I happened upon this romance novel and I start listening to them. And then it just becomes this thing, to keep myself from feeling like love is awful because I didn't have this awful breakup. It just was really sad that it came to its end, to keep my heart soft.

And so even romance novels is really this tool that I have been using to keep me seated so that I don't harden, so that I don't become thug life. Men are just going to leave you. I don't want to feel that way.

Kaa: Yeah. That's such an important point because that softness is, it's hard to be soft when what you experience obviously is discrimination and oppression and marginalization. It's a normal natural reaction to harden for self-protection. And what would real wellness look like? Is it like being in your hard carapace but in Bali? Or is it being able to, as you said, be

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vulnerable, be soft and learn how to, yes, protect yourself and have the boundaries you need but not, yeah, be so shut down.

EbonyJanice: And I carry that with me everywhere too, because even inside of that, I can still do hard things from my soft place. Every time I have to get up out of my softness and create a boundary or fight and those things are reality. I have to do those things. But doing it from my softness so that my body still feels like my own when it's all over. You think about how it feels after you've got to cuss somebody out, you don't even feel good anymore, even if you won the argument.

Kara: Right. You're all dysregulated and you don't know how to calm down.

EbonyJanice: I haven't mastered this, of course because life, but I want to know what it feels like to say and do really hard things from my seat. And I bring up, who are my softness icons and archetypes who have said and done really hard things but as a seated version, most seated version of themselves?

And I bring Toni Morrison always into that conversation because Toni Morrison could get you together like that, but just with this, "Look at you, if someone else has to be on their knees in order for you to be tall, what do you have but your little self." It's like Toni Morrison, sitting back chilling, talking about racism and really hard things but as herself, in herself, and then probably went home and took a nap.

Kara: Yeah. The process is, I think, getting better at returning to softness when you do get. And I think we're using softness in a lot of different ways, but here we mean sort of a regulated nervous system. I mean one of the things I see happen in wellness culture is that people think that the goal is to be always perfectly regulated, which is just saying your goal is never feel negative emotion. Not realistic. And you need your flight or fight. You don't

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want to be so regulated that you walk in the street and the bus is coming at you and you're like, "Oh." And then you get hit by the bus.

You need your nervous system to get you out of there but being able to come back to that. And I mean, I definitely can feel in my own body, what does it feel like when I'm able to approach a difficult conversation or a challenging thing from I'm grounded versus I am flying? You said that all Black girls are activists. Can you tell us a little bit more about speaking of those kind of the hard things or the challenges, what does that mean to you?

EbonyJanice: Yeah. All the Black girls are activists, it's really just this simple statement that showing up as ourselves in a world that doesn't want anything to do with us actually being ourselves is radical and revolutionary. And if the Black girls don't do nothing else but show up as ourselves, we have done quite a bit of work. And that too is our very relevant, incredible contribution to revolution.

Kara: And it's so important because there's so much, especially if you care about social justice, you care about revolution or whatever, people have different ideas of what that's going to be. But there is this sort of like, well, the cause is what matters. So put your personal things aside. And they're inextricably linked. Just doing that work to show up as yourself when you're told never to be yourself, and that you don't matter, is a powerful political act, but I feel like that's like missing from a lot of the dialog around this stuff.

EbonyJanice: The body is a political site. Our identities are inherently political. We didn't decide that it was going to be that, but it just from every way that you can think about it, from an economic, from a political, from a spiritual, religious, from all these directions, the body is a political site. I've talked about having this very spiritual religious background. And so I've

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studied theology, but multi faith religions. And so prior to my theological shift, my background is Christianity.

And so I really love Jesus. I like to bring Jesus into the conversation. Jesus, in a Christo-centric society, the way that we're taught about Jesus is really watered down. We don't think about Jesus as this radical revolutionary being who was an activist. And his body then became this political site, at which point they took him because of his politics, because of his political belief. They took him and put his body on display in order to say, don't do this because this is what can happen to your body if you are against these systems, these ideas, whatever, whatever.

And that's not how we talk about Jesus. And that's not how we talk about crucifixion. And that's not how we talk about the life of Christ as very deeply invested in the wellness of people, of people having food to eat, people not paying taxes that were not going to actually benefit them. And so I would bring Jesus as both the Christ for many people and as a character for a lot of other people into the conversation because He's such a famous example of the fact that the body is inherently political.

And so that's what happens to all of us. If you are fat, your body is a political site. If you have a uterus, your body is a political site. If you have skin that is darker than what is a certain proximity to whiteness, your body is a political site. So it is impossible if you have any kind of disability in this world will disable you in all the ways possible, because we live and exist in this ablest society. If you are a human being living in New York City, which I think is one of my favorite cities in the world but one of the most disabling cities ever.

Kara: Yeah, and very non-accessible, especially [crosstalk].

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EbonyJanice: Yeah, that's what I mean. Even as a reasonably able bodied person, when I lived in New York City, I had to recognize my own disabilities. UPS is not always bringing my 50 plus pound box up the stairs to my door. So I have to do it even though that's what I paid for, deliver it to my home. My home is not the lobby, please bring this box to me. But now I have to figure out how to take this 60 pound box up three flights of stairs. This is a very disabling experience that I'm having.

And so my body, no matter what, there's something political about that. So to try to excuse or absolve yourself of it is inherently impossible because there's something, no matter what your identity is, your background, your race, your whatever. There is something about you that this society has said, "Not making space for it, thanks."

Kara: Yeah. Let's talk a little bit more about the religious element. I think that's something that I talk about my religious background on the podcast. I'm Jewish. But I think definitely this is a thing, I had somebody in my membership group, *The Clutch* the other day say, she's like, "Do you have to be atheist in here?" "And I was like, [crosstalk]." She was like, "I'm looking forward to the Christian subgroup meeting later." And I was like, "Well, I think you just answered your own question because there's a Christian subgroup, so no, you don't have to be atheist."

But there is this sort of, I think people struggle. I definitely have seen a lot of, I was going to say for whatever reason, but actually for many reasons, that would be another whole podcast. Life coaching, I think in particular gets a lot of people who, for instance, came from high demand religions, are kind of looking for a new way of being, a new set of rules, which is not what I provide. But that's what they think before they come in, that I'm going to now tell them what to do.

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But I've seen people go through this journey of struggle a lot of trying to take their faith and take it through this revolution, personal revolution they're experiencing where they're really questioning a lot of the patriarchal white supremacist kind of everything else systems that they were taught in their religion. And what to do about their faith or how to navigate that when they're doing that deprogramming. So I wonder if you could speak to kind of that experience and what your thoughts are about it.

EbonyJanice: Yeah. I talk about softness so much because I'm using it in relationship again, with this the regulating and the nervous system and/or even language of home frequency. I know what it feels like when I'm actually home in my body. I am here. I'm present. This is EbonyJanice, actually. And I think that this is important even in the conversation about, how do I do this growing, evolving, healing transformative work and be in 'right relationship' with my God or with the religion of my youth or this thing that I've ascribed to?

What I believe is that, at which point I really understood my seated self as the truth, as the gospel, that my body is now a part of sacred text. The same way that I would read the *Bible* and be like, "Oh, this is the guide for me, this is showing me the way to go." That there is something divine, that's the brilliance of the divine in my opinion. And you know what I believe? There is something divine about me as me that knows the truth.

And so there are times when I've spent high six figures in coaching, therapy programs, healing, all the things, all the things. I have buried myself. I have resurrected. I have plant medicine. I've done all the things. I've been deeply in this journey. And there are times when I will walk into an experience with a leader or a teacher or a coach and something that they say, it just doesn't resonate with seated EbonyJanice. And it doesn't resonate with what my belief system is overall.

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And so I bring all of those things into this space, the brilliance and wisdom of this teacher, this elder, whatever. I bring seated EbonyJanice into this space, how does seated EbonyJanice feel about that? And then I bring the teaching of whatever my religious truth system is or my spiritual truth system is, and I try to see if any of them align. I do the same thing with my religion too though. There are things inside the religion of my youth where I'm like, "No, thank you. I don't know if this actually."

There's a queer theologian, her name is Zan West, says, "We should always be asking the question, who does it benefit, of religion particularly, who does it benefit for me to believe it this way?"

Kara: But that's true for all of your thoughts, people. The people listening to this podcast [crosstalk], all the thoughts you have about yourself, about who you're supposed to be, who does it benefit for you to believe that?

EbonyJanice: And it's profound, again, going earlier in this conversation, talking about how deeply socialized we are. It's profound to realize that the majority of my casual thoughts are never going to fit me.

Kara: Right. You're just walking around in clothes that never fit, hand me downs that don't work for you and you just think it's normal. You don't even know there's clothes out there that you like that would fit, that would look good because you're just wearing scratchy overalls that someone gave you that don't even fit.

EbonyJanice: Yeah. I think that certainly is the benefit though of doing the work of actually always asking those questions and interrogating the self. And I love the idea of morning pages, just doing the deep brain dump of these are my actual thoughts, this is how I'm feeling, this is what's on my mind. And the morning pages are so random, it's like a grocery shopping list and I'm horny.

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Kara: Just everything that's going on up there.

EbonyJanice: Just everything because I don't necessarily even know that we are actually taught to really create time in our day to just think our own thoughts. And I give myself time at least once a day, I give myself more than once, once a day to think about my own thoughts at this point. But in the beginning of this journey, there is this set aside time every day where I just think about what I'm thinking about. And how profound it was for me to discover so much about myself that I didn't know about myself.

Because I'm in this productive go, go, go, grind, grind, grind culture, I never knew that I should probably sit down and think about what it is that I'm just subconsciously thinking about so that I can even go and deal with those things. So in conclusion to all that, if there were one, is just that I do think coming into these spaces, where you do have, I like the language of high demand religion, where you do come from a background of a high demand religion where there is a set of rules and ideas and values that are kind of dictating who it is that you get to be.

And then you come into some information or some ideas that don't necessarily jive with that, is to be able to bring all of those beings into that space and ask the question as your actual seated self. Is this actually benefiting me for me to continue to believe this? Would it benefit me at the very least, to be open to this conversation? And is there anything in me? This is what I say, and my background is I'm a preacher. And so I sometimes lie about closing my sermon, but I really am coming to the end of this sermon.

I have a dog, his name is Puppy, he's 13, and he's a little old man and he doesn't make any noise. He's sitting behind me right now. He's just the quietest dog on the planet and to the point that he doesn't bark and people have asked me, did I get his voice box removed because he doesn't make

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any noise ever? I've had him since he was a baby, he doesn't make noise. But when he does make noise, it's just this, mm, that's it. It's hilarious. And it's a running joke about the fact that the dog doesn't make any noise.

And so when I first started noticing this, when I first got him, because I never had a dog before this dog. I got him in a breakup, but anyways, so I never had a dog before I had Puppy. And I would hear this little, mm, what is he doing? And then a couple minutes later, somebody would knock at the door or I would hear that little mm, and then somebody would be coming, some kids running down the street always a couple of minutes later. How does he know that somebody's coming to the door before I can even see anybody coming to the door?

The language of your instinct or your gut or all of that, it's being in relationship with your guard dog. But you think about a guard dog and you think it's going to be barking and making all this noise. No, the guard dog is usually Puppy La Foie Ivy Kardashian. It usually sounds like mm. And learning how to really just pay attention to that mm and trust it like it is the gospel. So in the times when somebody, when the scripture is saying something that makes me feel mm, I want to pay attention to that.

When this coach or this idea or this teacher or this philosopher is saying something that makes me feel mm, I am learning to pay attention to that because I'm always listening for, again my body as this divine technology that knows something more than I know down the street. It knows it some kind of way, and so I'm in the practice at the very least of learning to trust that.

Kara: I love that. That mm, reminds me of the conversation on Toni Morrison. She would just be like, "Mm." And that would be her whole, you'd say a whole long thing and she'd be like, "Mm". This is beautiful, I mean I think that brings us right back to sort of where we started, which is a

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beautiful closing point, which is that, learning to listen to and trust your own authority.

I have an episode of this on my podcast called No Gods, No Gurus. Because when you come from a high demand religion, what it's done, and obviously many people, [inaudible] who didn't come from high demand religions, I'm just saying. In a lot of ways, patriarchy is a high demand religion, it's just undercover, so is white supremacy. It basically requires, actually that's true, I haven't said that before, but I think that that's true.

EbonyJanice: That's good, yeah, it is, for sure.

Kara: I will do another podcast about that later but it has the same set of a whole set of norms you have to follow, ways you have to be. It tells you who's in charge. It tells you what to do with your time. It tells you what you're allowed to believe. You have to spend a lot of time following the precepts.

EbonyJanice: And you worship it.

Kara: And you try to conform, be good enough to receive favor. And then when you have to find some connection to your own authority. And I love that you talk about the body as the site for that because even if you're not spiritual or religious, you don't have to think about it as divinity. But it's the same process of your body is that barometer for what thoughts resonate with you, what thoughts are going to work for you, how do you want to feel.

It's the only thing that you can really tune into and know for yourself. And that's such a decentralized authority, which is completely opposite to that system we're living, so good.

EbonyJanice: Absolutely.

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Kara: Where can people find out more about you? Where can they buy your book? Let's give them the whole book title again. Tell them all the things.

EbonyJanice: I wrote a book, it's called *All the Black Girls are Activists: A Fourth Wave Womanist Pursuit of Dreams as Radical Resistance* and you can find it at alltheblackgirlsareactivists.com. Really the easiest way to find me is just @EbonyJanice everywhere, @EbonyJanice, yeah.

Kara: And wherever books are sold, I assume?

EbonyJanice: Wherever, all the places that books are sold, it's there, yeah.

Kara: Go buy the book. We didn't even get to talk about womanism versus feminism. You'll have to come back another time. And I just am very excited that this podcast title is going to be authority and romance novels.

EbonyJanice: I'm here for it. I'm here for it.

Kara: Alright, thank you so much for coming on.

EbonyJanice: Thank you, it was a pleasure.

Hey. Hey. Before you skip to the next episode or close your podcast app, god forbid, don't forget to sign up for Feminist Summer School. We are going through Feminist Summer School inside The Clutch during the month of August. If you join The Clutch by July 31st, you not only get all the incredible tools and resources and practices in The Clutch to teach you to create any outcome you want in your life, to feel more self-confident. To get rid of your family drama, to get that promotion or that raise to reach that impossible goal. To love your body, to enjoy dating, to have better sex, to

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heal your nervous system. Whatever you want to do, The Clutch is going to help you do it.

But when you join by July 31st, you also get to participate in Feminist Summer School, which is our incredible series of bonus trainings on fun and joy and pleasure live workshops where you can learn how to reclaim the fun of summer without all of that socialization in your brain dragging you down, making you feel insecure or guilty or overwhelmed or busy or all of those things that get in the way of that true summer vibe.

And when you learn how to change your thoughts, you can actually ride that breezy summer feeling all year long, just using your mind. We're going to have fun challenges. We're even going to have recess because we love a theme and we commit to our thought work, to our themes, to everything. So come join us. Text your email to +1 347-934-8861. Again, you text your email to + 1 347-934-8861 or to unfuckyourbrain.com/summer. Bye.