

Creating The  
Colored Girl  
Beautiful

# Creating The Colored Girl Beautiful

by

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May 2020

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Fine Arts in Integrated Design in the Yale Gordon College of Liberal Arts

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# Context

## Introduction

When I first learned of the book, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, I was taking a graduate school course. One of my classmates was using it as a reference for a project she had presented. When she mentioned it, I was intrigued by the name and description: an etiquette book for black women. I'd never come across anything like it so I looked it up. I discovered that the book itself was published in 1916. Over one hundred years old. I was absolutely fascinated and wondered how I'd not known such a book existed.

I came to wonder how the existence of such a book had eluded for the entire length of my education. But looking back on my learning experience, I started to see how this would have been possible. I realized that growing up in the United States, my Black history education has been dwindled down to a few key items: February, a handful of Black history icons, and three major eras in history: Slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement. Anything outside of that was largely neglected history books. Topics outside of these areas were not afforded much teaching time.

As a result, noticeably missing from education for me is knowledge of the Progressive Era spanning from 1897 to around 1920. This is a period in American history where conditions for Black Americans where life was being redefined. A generation removed from the abolition of slavery, daily life for Black people at this time was strained, due to deep segregation. But it was also filled with hope and energy for change. More and more resources were being created that catered specifically to Black people and whole communities in some cases were designed as safe spaces for Black America. Black institutions of higher education were being erected, black-owned businesses were built, and new schools of thought created

specifically to address the concerns and cares of Black Americas were being discussed, debated, and shared heavily within the Black community.

*The Colored Girl Beautiful* was written by Madame Emma Azalia Hackley. Born and raised in Tennessee to free parents, Madame Hackley was fortunate enough to grow up under working class parents who made sure she was well educated. Such formal education was considered a privilege for any Black person and Madame Hackley made good use of hers. She put every ounce of her being working toward what she called the “uplift of her people.”

I was completely enthralled with this text when I first encountered it. It highlighted this era of change in a way that I hadn’t encountered before. I blazed through the book in no time, devouring every line. On the one hand, there was much about the book that I found encouraging and uplifting. There was an unshakeable faith that lined each page. The book is thick with reassurance and encouragement for Black women.

Since discovering this text I’ve thought often about how different my upbringing would have been if I’d had access to a text like this. Who would I have become if I’d been exposed regularly to content involving strong Black women who were making a way for themselves? Would I have carried myself differently if I’d read the type of encouragements found in Madame Hackley’s book on a regular basis? Would I have been able to hold my head a little higher? Walk with more confidence? What if I’d grown up reading books like hers and it was constantly being reinforced that I should be proud of my dark skin rather than self-conscious of it? We of course can’t know the answers to these things, but I believe that young Black girls need this sort of encouragement in order to hold their heads high in a world that still isn’t built for them. I know I’d have enjoyed it. I love that Madame Hackley created this space for Black women back in 1916 when this book

was published. And we as Black women still need that space today. We need that uplift and encouragement. This is one of the things that continues to make this text relevant after 100 years. I'd like for *The Colored Girl Beautiful* podcast to create that space today as well.

And while the very existence of Madame Hackley's story warms my heart, there was also language in her book that made me deeply uncomfortable; language I would consider oppressive and sexist. She encouraged women to be quiet and warned them not to tempt men—as though the men themselves had no control over their behavior. And yet she encouraged women to be unafraid and to have faith in themselves. This apparent conflict was intriguing and found myself wanting to know more about this book and this period in time. My fascination with this juxtaposition of freedom and oppression is what originally fueled my desire to do this work. I set out to explore both the radical and composed aspects of Madame Hackley's writing and how those same words would impact Black women today.

Despite the conflicted feelings I had about her writing, the fervor and passion with which Madame Hackley wrote was truly inspiring. I wish I'd known about women like Madame Hackley growing up. And there were more women like her—Madame C.J. Walker, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper to name a few—that were building lives of their own and traveling the world and pouring their love in labor into their people. I wish that during my secondary education, I'd walked away with a sense of possibility and perseverance for people who look like me rather than a long list of unfortunate events and the small handful of memorable names. Black people and more specifically Black women have contributed so much more than that in history.

## From Print to Audio

I'd originally proposed completing this project as an abbreviated annotated version of the book. My intent had been to focus on three specific chapters: "Love," "Personal Appearance," and "Self-Control," as these topics carried a lot of weight in the early 1900's and still does today. As a secondary focus I also outlined "The Colored Working Girl Beautiful," "The Colored Wife Beautiful," and "The Colored Mother Beautiful" as key chapters to consider as well if time would allow. The book would include the original chapter and a corresponding "translation" of said chapter where I would include thoughts on that same topic from Black women today. Original chapters would also include annotations that would expand on life during that time to help give context to some of the original work. As time went on and I began planning, I realized that this particular format wouldn't fully convey the depth and meaning I was looking for in written form. I felt that I needed something more dynamic and immersive to convey the weight and importance of this text to me.

While I consider writing to be a powerful form of communication, I was consuming lots of audio content as I was beginning this project and realized that audio was a medium that was worth considering as a medium in this project. Much of the podcast content that I consume is a version of storytelling rather than just a conversation between two people and I find this to be especially engaging. Podcasts are gaining popularity for the way they provide a uniquely personal listening experience. Some would even call this a more intimate experience. While storytelling is just as engaging as reading, podcasts have an added element of captivation with the addition of music and tone of voice to aid in the listener experience. While I had not considered this originally, I do also like that storytelling via podcast pays homage to the tradition of African-American storytelling. I was excited to take on the new endeavor.

One of my favorite podcasts of all time is *S-town*. The show is about a man named John B. McLemore who lives in what John refers to loving as Shittown, Alabama. The host, Brian Reed, is an expert story-teller and does an amazing job sharing his encounters and adventures with John. The storyline itself is somewhat sensational but Reed also does his part to make the story relatable as well. While many of us will not share the same experiences as the story's main character, Reed uses his writing to make sure that listeners of any background from just about any part of the country, care about John's backwoods country life. The show is brought to life with great writing, perfectly scored music, and the colorful character and personality of real-life people.

This podcast is everything I love about a good novel but with the added texture of audio. I am drawn to the type of connection created when someone is telling a good story. And when told well, these are the stories that make us feel something. These are the stories people remember. In order to create a similar connection, I made the decision to change my format from a written book to a podcast.

After transitioning to audio, it became clear as the show was coming together that no one chapter could be wholly summed up in each episode. I made the decision then to focus on a particular idea illustrated by a phrase or concept from the book rather than trying to sum up each chapter. However, I did still end up covering each of the original topics over the course of season one of the show. This resulted in more in-depth conversation on a particular subject. It also means that further down the line this method will allow me to have more content available to me for exposition rather than being limited to the book's original nineteen chapters.

Completing this project has given me a platform share uplifting messages of Black pride and self-efficacy among Black women that are still meaningful today. It has also allowed me to share my thoughts and critiques on some antiquated points of

view. I've also been able to give voice to everyday Black women and created a place where their voices can be centered. I feel very fortunate to have been able to do this work and am excited to continue.

### About *The Colored Girl Beautiful*

*The Colored Girl Beautiful* was published during the Progressive Era in 1916 and was meant to be a guide for young Black women on how to hold their heads high while trying to successfully navigate life in spite of a country that thought less of them. Each chapter focuses on a different area of life and offers specific guidance on that topic. With a total of nineteen chapters, the book covers everything from motherhood to personal appearance to, of course, love. The text is the first of its kind specifically created for a Black female audience.

It is important to note that no such text existed before *The Colored Girl Beautiful* was published. This is the first etiquette book written for Black women. This text would have contributed to a bustling landscape of popular arguments of the day about recommended behavior for Black Americans and would have been a valuable resource. Much of the conversation among African-Americans in the early 1900's was about how we could progress as a race. One popular point of view was to work on being an upstanding citizen to prove one's worth both inside and outside of the Black community. This turned into a concept later termed 'respectability.' The idea being that it is our duty as Black people to prove to the white community that we deserve to be included. Madame Hackley's writing would have fallen squarely into this camp. It was a concept that was touted heavily by several Black leaders at the time and was widely embraced by the Black community, the effects of which we still see today. As outlined by Dr. Lisa Pertillar-Brevard, the authoritative expert on Madame Hackley's life, the book and its claims were widely accepted by the Black community.

I started in my research looking to explore how Madame Hackley's words of advice of persistence but also compliance would have shaped a young Black woman's sense of self and identity. Her writing not only covered recommendations for personal interactions but also words of wisdom for young women newly navigating the workforce. As young, free Black women start to enter the workforce and are looking to be seen as desirable job candidates, guidance on how to present is crucial. These young women were walking into a world that was reluctant to have them, to say the least. But finding work was of course essential. And any resource that could give them a leg up would have been welcome. This made the type of advice that Madame Hackley had to offer invaluable for young working-class Black women looking to advance themselves and their families. These guidelines were meant to guide and instruct Black women on their path to success. But how does such advice hold up after over one hundred years?

Resources offering advice like what Madame Hackley offered are scarcely available today. Advice columns in Cosmo pale in comparison to the well-thought-out complete book of life advice offered in *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. My thesis project uncovers how some of that advice has held up over a century and the ways in which we have and have not changed since the original text was written.

### About the Author

Madame Emma Azalia Hackley was an educated member of the Black elite. She studied music and was a highly sought-after vocalist. Her talent allowed her to travel and perform world-wide. In addition to her accomplishments as a singer, Madame Hackley acquired many skills and had a varied career. She spoke publicly, she wrote several articles for a magazine that she and her husband

published, and was an involved activist. She even started and ran a school for some time.

One of the main ways Madame Hackley made a living was to teach private music lessons. She felt teaching as an important mechanism for spreading knowledge and she excelled at it. One way she exercised this skill was to teach Negro spirituals in a community chorus. This was her way of making Black culture more palatable, more acceptable. It was her way of contributing to what she called the “uplift of her people.” This concern of “uplift” fueled her interest in every project she worked on professionally.

It was no surprise, then, that Madame Hackley was invited to speak to the female students at the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers, now known as Tuskegee University. Because of Madame Hackley’s experience and education, she would have been seen as a very distinguished guest. The talk she gave, by her own account, was very informal, but the experience impacted her significantly. She found the whole experience so endearing that she later published *The Colored Girl Beautiful* as a follow-up to these talks.

Madame Hackley wrote *The Colored Girl Beautiful* as a guide for young Black women and she believed deeply in the things she wrote. She cared deeply for Black women and encouraged Black women to be proud of their dark brown skin. Not able to have her own children, she poured herself into her work with Black women. She truly lived a life that she encouraged other women to pursue.

Keeping up a respectable sort of appearance was important to her. Presentation and impressions were essential. And on top of that she was undoubtedly a woman who worked tirelessly to accomplish her goals. But none of this came without a cost. She pushed and pushed herself to do more and be better constantly. She

continued to work and travel even after being warned by her doctor that she should slow down. She died at the young age of 55 from a brain hemorrhage.

Even though she lived a hundred years ago, I see so many similarities in the woman that she was and Black women today. Somehow, we've managed to carry that drive to excel, and to push hard and to present well into the present. We've even carried the drive to frequently put these things before even our own well-being. While I do believe that these are characteristics we see in all women, the driving force for Black women is often this idea of "racial uplift" or "racial well-being," where at least part of our motivation for keeping up this level of presentation is fueled by the need to represent well for our race. This is compounded with the pressures of femininity. Without us even realizing it, we've held on to these ideals and still feel we have a responsibility to portray a certain image. This in turn has shaped much of our sense of worth throughout the last century. The expression is different now, but fundamentally, the overall idea has remained the same.

While we don't know how well the book *The Colored Girl Beautiful* sold, we do know that it's fallen into obscurity since its time. While much has changed over the last 100 years, what intrigues me are the messages for Black women that have held strong.

### Literature Review

A significant portion of my preliminary research for this work was finding resources to support my initial research questions. To do so I went looking for information and articles geared toward Black women and self-perception. For my search terms I used "Black women and self-perception," "Black women and self-esteem," "Black women and beauty" and "Black women and identity" to name a few. I also looked for research on beauty standards in the early 1900's and

anything I could find on Madame Hackley herself. The goal was to find content that could help give context to the behavior of Black women over about 100 years. This would allow for more informed conversation over the course of the show.

Madame Hackley lived during a time when it seemed like being “respectable” or “acceptable” to White society meant an easier life. Lighter skin and straighter hair meant you were less susceptible to scrutiny in White spaces. Good behavior meant you were less likely to offend your White counterparts. It was thought by some that if we could prove our worth by behaving well and getting as close to Whiteness as possible, we could be accepted by White society. While we know now that these concepts were founded in racist tropes about the character of Black people and that no amount of adjustment in appearance or behavior would provide a meaningful change in the overall perception of Black people at the time, many of us tried to adhere to these concepts as a survival mechanism. It is in this cultural climate that Madame Hackley wrote *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. I set out to learn more about what how this thinking would affect readers of Hackley’s work during that time.

In addition to providing a solid foundation of background knowledge for my interviews, I realized that doing this research was important to me in a way that I didn’t understand until I encountered it. I read through so many academic papers that took topics that were you unique or important to Black women seriously. I read scholarly articles such as *Black Women’s Self-Perceptions of Attractiveness Following Exposure to White Versus Black Beauty Standards*, *Du Bois’s Dubious Feminism: Evaluating through the Black Flame Trilogy*, and *Fighting ‘light skin’ as a standard of beauty*. It was refreshing to see that these topics were being studied and discussed by at least some within academic circles. In reading titles like these it was clear to see the connection to Madame Hackley’s thoughts on beauty and the concerns of Black women on those same topics today.

While I did not use these works directly in my podcast, reading these titles provided a valuable groundwork for the interviews that I did. This research allowed me to move forward confidently with my work. I continued knowing that there is some academic basis for the hypothesis that I made about the similarities between Black women today and Madame Hackley's writing back in 1916 when the book was published.

[\[Appendix A – Thesis Proposal Bibliography\]](#)

### Target Audience

I identified the audience for my podcast as Black women ages 16–35 in my original proposal. I decided on this population in order to address the most active and educated audience for podcasts within what I believe would have been *The Colored Girl Beautiful*'s equivalent intended audience for today. However, women of all ages and backgrounds will find value in the different perspectives that the show has to offer. While reliable listener data regarding race is still fairly new and relatively sparse, there are plenty of statistics around podcast listenership and age. According to Edison Research, people age 24 – 35 are most likely to listen to podcasts. Aside from the Edison research I based my proposed audience largely on feedback from people who listened to the show. This meant that I sought feedback regularly in parts of the creation process. This was information I gathered before, during and after the release of a particular episode. I sent the show to people in my circles. My producer sent it to people she knew. We were constantly looking for feedback from anyone who was willing to listen and give it. And we found over time that many of the parties interested in responding with feedback were indeed in Black women close to the original 16–35 age range. But we did also find that people of all ages and backgrounds were willing to help and were excited about the content. Anecdotally, I can report that there was a concentration in the mid-

twenties to early thirties age range in regards to feedback submission and overall interest in the show.

My original age range is confirmed and also expanded by looking at our Instagram follower statistics. While none of the metrics we were able to gather include race or ethnicity, our analytics do show these data for followers of *The Colored Girl Beautiful* Instagram page as of early April 2020:

- 81% female
- 46% age 25–34
- 37% age 35–44

While the original age range wasn't necessarily incorrect, it actually turned out that it also wasn't quite complete. While the bulk of our audience does seem to be in the 25–34 age range there's also a sizeable portion of the audience that skews slightly older.

An important piece of the audience discussion involves the total number of downloads per episode. For *The Colored Girl Beautiful* Podcast, listenership spiked in the early days peaking at 900 downloads within the first 30 days and averaging out at nearly 300 downloads per episode within the first 30 days of an episode's release. While sustained numbers would be ideal, it is not uncommon for a new show to get lots of buzz initially and then for downloads to taper off over time. Today the number of downloads within the first 30 days has been increasing slightly month by month indicating slow but steady growth. While I had not made any assumptions about what listenership would be for a brand-new show, I had not dreamt what its progress would be in less than a year. According to experts at [“The Feed” Podcast](#), produced by Libsyn, one of the most well-known podcast hosting services available, as of April 2019, any show that gets more than 136 downloads within the first 30 days is doing better than half the shows out

there. I am delighted that *The Colored Girl Beautiful* falls into that category. There is still lots of room for growth, however, and I plan to continue growing the show's audience.

[\[Appendix B – Downloads Chart\]](#)

## Essential Questions

As I read through the book, several questions started to emerge that I realized I wanted to answer. The following were chief among them:

1. How have Black women's views of topics like "love," "self-respect" and "personal appearance" changed?
2. What's different now in 2017 that did not exist in 1916 that would cause changes to the definition of black womanhood?
3. How does race impact one's self-image?
4. Have Black women been able to embrace good self-esteem for better mental health?
5. What concepts have stayed the same even though 100 years have passed?

These questions became the foundation for my thesis proposal. My quest then became how to explore the answers to these questions.

## Medium

Once I'd decided on what to do, the next course of action was to figure out how best to explore these topics. In the early days of my thesis, I struggled to determine what medium I would use to explore these issues. I considered redesigning and republishing the original text. I'd toyed with the idea of an interactive e-book adding my thoughts on each subject, but ultimately I settled on audio for the medium. I wanted a way to bring this hundred-year-old content into the 21<sup>st</sup>

century while also making some space to add my own voice. Yet there's something simple and a bit nostalgic about listening to an only audio medium.

In recent years, podcasting has become a booming industry. Content creators and storytellers have flocked to this medium due to its ease of access and its intimate nature. Podcasts are also a medium we often listen to alone in our earbuds. This makes the voices feel close and gives the listener a sense that they're being directly spoken to. This made audio the ideal medium for the type of content I wanted to create: content that was intimate and personal and uplifting. It is also, by far, my favorite way to consume content. This sort of listening is especially engaging and has a way of making one feel like they're a part of the conversation being had.

As an avid listener of podcasts myself, I noticed and enjoyed these aspects of several of the shows I listened to. *Radiolab*, for example, is a show that does this well. They're really big on sound design so the story always feels very engaging and layered. The two hosts, Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich have a very natural chemistry that plays well in audio form. Even though the hosts are speaking to one another, the listener very much feels invited to the conversation. *The Nod*, is another example of a show where the two hosts who work well together and it feels a lot like you're a part of their conversation. Both of these shows also offer well-constructed stories which undoubtedly contributes to their success. These are the sorts of shows that became examples for the type of show I knew I wanted to create. While the style of content is certainly different, the overall caliber is what I knew I wanted to shoot for.

While I felt strongly about my decision to make this an audio project, I also knew that I wasn't quite equipped to do this story justice. I'd decided to distribute this project as a podcast. But as an avid podcast listener myself, I could not do this content the injustice of just throw something together. In order to do so I felt that I really needed a new set storytelling of skills. So I set out to increase my

knowledge on this topic. I achieved this primarily with my part in the Google Podcasts creators program, but also made a point to do my research on various platforms such as YouTube and Creative Live, and by closely examining what worked in the shows I listened to and enjoyed.

## Format

When it came to structure for this story, I knew I wanted to do something different. I felt that the normal formats of interviews and “chat-casts,” where two hosts simply choose a topic to discuss, had been done before and wanted to convey this information in a more meaningful way. As I was deliberating, I remembered a YouTube channel that I watch frequently called *Vlogbrothers*. The two brothers who make the content for this channel live in different states and use this medium to stay connected with one another. In each video one brother will directly address the other. This gave me the idea of writing a letter directly to Azalia. This would be my method of communicating with her.

Deciding on this format was not an easy decision to make. There were no shows I could find that had a format that was anything like what I wanted to do. Even shows centered around writing a letter were scarce. I believe I came across exactly one podcast that was formatted as a letter and it felt unengaging. So we knew we had to come up with something that didn’t leave the listener uninterested.

I started testing out different options for making the content of the show as interesting as possible. Initially I was going to have the whole episode be my letter to Azalia and the interview with my guest. I realized, however, that the content fell a little flat, similar to the one podcast I’d come across. My producer and I realized adding in our discussion about the interview gave a bit more texture and life to the content itself. We tested it out for episode one and decided to keep that format moving forward. So for each episode of *The Colored Girl Beautiful* podcast I

start off by directly addressing Azalia about a topic she wrote about in her book. What proceeds is then a mix of a discussion that I have with my producer about that topic and about an interview that I've conducted with a guest that corresponds with that topic. Our unique format and engaging topic have gotten us to an average 5-star rating in our Apple Podcast reviews.

## Deliverables

As project deliverables I set out to release a 6-episode audio podcast series featuring the curated stories of several Black women whom I interviewed. As the show developed, this turned into an 8-episode first season. The season was lengthened to accommodate the Christmas holiday as listenership is often low on holidays and one episode was split into two parts to better accommodate the story being told. All episodes are available for download wherever podcasts are found. Originally, I'd also planned to create a short novel-length book to accompany the podcast. As I focused my efforts on production of the show, I realized that there was not sufficient time to create this text and the podcast at the same time. After having completed production I've also come to the understanding that this text as I'd imagined it would not adequately complement the podcast so I will not be producing this text at a later date. In its stead, I will be republishing the original text in its entirety with some of my own notes and thoughts as an introduction to each topic. I would like to complete this piece of the process by the end of 2021.

[\[See Appendix C - Deliverables\]](#)

## Communication and Social Media Strategy

One of the main forms of outreach for informing current and potential listeners about the release of a new episode is social media. While the best way to gain new listeners is generally understood to be by word of mouth, it's also important to get the content onto various social media platforms. After attending several

conferences and workshops around social media strategies for podcasts, I chose Facebook for of its widespread usage, Instagram because of its discovery features and growing population, and Twitter for its ease of interaction and shareability. I post the same media to each platform but I tailor the text for each platform so that all three posts are not quite the same.

Each of these platforms has its limitations but all hold significant value.

Instagram is probably the most important of the three platforms because of its powerful discovery tools. I write the copy for social media posts according to Instagram because it allows me to pare down for the other platforms. These posts are not terribly long but will always be entertaining and relevant to the media of the post itself. Key here is adding relevant hashtags to every post to aid in discovery. Each post will have the maximum 30 hashtags permitted in order to increase the chances that someone who's never heard of the show before might find it. Since links cannot be included in posts, one link in the profile will redirect to an "IG Links" page that will display a link to important information such as the show's latest episode which is always displayed on the homepage of the website, a link to subscribe to the show's newsletter, and any other important event or opportunities listeners might want to know about. Facebook posts can be just about any length and can include any type of media. It's also got the benefit of being able to include links within the post itself. For these reasons I use it to post content to the *Colored Girl Beautiful* Facebook page for users who are mostly already familiar with the brand. These posts will always also include a direct link to the show. The copy is almost always the same as that on Instagram but will not include hashtags as this would clutter up the post. Most users only read the first few lines on a given post anyway and discovery is not Facebook's strong suit.

Twitter is of course the most restrictive platform due to the 240-character limit. This means that tweets are usually truncated significantly from the original post copy. There's always a direct link to the episode in the tweet along with the same

media. While tweets don't contain a lot of information, they are easily shared through the retweet feature which makes them great for engagement. One way to combat Twitter's character limit is to create short video clips of podcast content with text in the video showing the words from the clips. This allows for much more information to be shared and is more engaging because it's a video. While I've yet to implement this particular strategy, it will be an important part of outreach for season two.

[\[Appendix D – Varied Social Media Posts\]](#)

# Learning the Craft

While I felt like I could figure out a lot of the technical piece of producing a podcast, I knew that my storytelling skills were not quite up to par. I am an avid consumer of audio and wanted to ensure that the work I did was as close to the type of content I was used to listening to as I was humanly capable of. My first attempt at acquiring the storytelling skills I would need to complete this project successfully was to apply for the SoundUp Bootcamp offered by Spotify in late Spring 2018. This was a weeklong bootcamp for 10 lucky winners that awarded up to \$10,000 to 3 of the 10 participants with funding to produce their shows. Moreover, this program was specifically geared toward women of color. I submitted my application along with 18,000 other applicants and waited as the notification deadline came and went. Several weeks after the original deadline, Spotify reached out with a very polite rejection email. But determined to make my project the best that it could be, I continued my hunt for solid storytelling learning opportunities.

From here I moved on to short e-courses, Udemy classes, and I also just started listening to more and more quality podcast content. I became very adamant. Eventually, I got wind of several audio festivals taking place. Among them were the *Third Coast Audio Festival 2018* in Chicago, *WerkIt! 2018* in New York, and *Podfest 2019* in Seattle. I'd learned from forums and public radio email lists that these were the premiere events for learning this craft of audio storytelling and made plans to attend.

## Google Podcasts Creators Program

For the production of my podcast, I learned a lot about storytelling and planning the show participating in the inaugural cohort of Google Podcasts creators

program. This was a 20-week intensive podcast production program where participants were given extensive training in storytelling for their podcast production. Six podcast projects were chosen from a pool of over 6,000 applications with a total of 14 participants from countries all over the world. Each team was awarded \$40,000 for the production of their show.

[\[See Appendix E – Google Podcasts creators program\]](#)

[\[See Appendix F – Google Podcasts creators program Application Materials\]](#)

# Methodology

## Overview

There was a lot to consider when putting the pieces of the show together. The summer of 2019 was an intense time of serious planning. I knew what topics I wanted to focus on as these were topics I'd decided on in my research and also in the Google Podcasts creators program. But still I had to do the work of deciding what the show would actually sound like. I'd also already decided that the show would be in the format of a letter, but determining how the piece would come together took lots of trial and error. Initially, I started off writing my letter to Madame Hackley first. But I soon found that this made adding in the content of the tape difficult to incorporate. I also tried adding lots of narration around the interview tape, but this always ended up being much more of my voice than I felt made sense. Ultimately I ended up recording a "planned" conversation with my producer about the tape. This allowed us to have a naturally flowing conversation and made for a much more interesting listen than just straight narration from me. Once that conversation was recorded, I would then record my narration next and then my letter to Madame Hackley last, whom I referred to in the show as Azalia, so as to sound more familiar.

Once everything was recorded, I would almost always start editing by selecting my favorite pieces of tape from the interview. I referred to these as "selects." I would then add the pieces of tape that featured pieces of conversation my producer and I had about the selects. Last, I would record my narration and my letter directly inside of the editing software. The final .mp3 file would be sent to my producer for any last-minute adjustments and would then be ready for upload.

[\[See Appendix G – Technical Details of Creating Audio Files\]](#)

# Brand Design

The original text of *The Colored Girl Beautiful* is more than one hundred years old. In making my branding selections for the podcast, I wanted to give a new edge to something with an older feel. I took inspiration from vintage book covers for visuals. These books often had a similar layout: ornate swirls and patterns around the edges, usually in gold, overlaying a single solid color.

## Logo

Vintage books were my main visual inspiration when choosing a typeface for the logo. It is an all-type logo chosen to keep things simple, similar to the way the covers of many vintage books were primarily focused on the title only and did not include much in terms of illustration. I considered adding decorative elements to the logo to mimic the ornate embellishments that were often focused around the edges and trim of many vintage book covers, but decided against it. Instead I chose to select a typeface that had its own flourishes without being too flashy. I went in search of typefaces that had both straightforward and ornate qualities—clean lines to keep things relatively simple but embellishments here and there that made it interesting. I tried a total of twenty different typefaces that did not work. Finally I settled on the Port Fashion display typeface. It's neat but has a bit of a fancy flare to it.

A challenge I had in creating my logo was the word placement. Because the words “colored,” “girl,” and “beautiful” are significantly different in length, I had to do some finagling to get the words to fit together well and in the right order. I came up with the solution to make the word “girl” larger since the content is targeted toward women. This allowed for a better balance of the word “beautiful” since it's much longer than the rest of the phrase. While the overall look creates an unusual shape not seen frequently for a logo, I've come to embrace its unique shape and

find that it adds character to the logo that is endearing. I've been using the current logo for the last year and a half and get compliments often on its aesthetics.

[\[Appendix H - Logo Iterations\]](#)

## Print and Web Typefaces

For print and web, I use two primary typefaces for this project.

Abril Fatface – Unique and a bit old-timey, this font stands out well at a larger point size and is perfect for headings.

Raleway – More modern and edgy, this is a legible sans-serif font perfect for large blocks of body copy.

I selected these typefaces because they pair well together and they are Google fonts which means that they're also widely available in many custom font Wordpress plugins. This was a strategic decision that allows me to go from print to digital content while being able to maintain continuity of my brand and ease of functionality with the web services I use currently.

## Colors

I chose a deep purple for the main color to convey depth and seriousness on the content. I'm also a fan of the way this sort of deep purple looks on black and brown skin. I chose the tan color for its resemblance to the gold embossed elements often found on vintage books. While gold is a regal, stately color, tan is a simpler, more modern-feeling color. Together the two form a weighty but approachable pair. In most use cases, the dark purple color is used for the background with all of the text in the tan color. When appropriate, this order is reversed so as to be a bit easier on the eyes or is reversed for emphasis. For example, the main page of the website is one single page that does not require any scrolling. Because this is a small amount of content, this combination does not feel

too heavy. However, on longer pages where there is lots of reading involved, the order is reversed to make for an easier reading experience.

## Accents

Where appropriate, there is on occasion a thin line surrounding content. Meant to be a sort of reverse of the vintage book cover look where there is a trim, but rather than being ornate, it's very simple. This was used, for example, in slideshows for Google Podcast creators program creative reviews.

[\[Appendix I – Brand Mood Board\]](#)

[\[Appendix J – Brand Samples\]](#)

[\[Appendix K – Slideshow Slide\]](#)

# Delivery

## Audio Hosting

Before a podcast can be distributed to the world, that exported .mp3 file must be put into a format that's deemed consumable for podcatchers. This is called an RSS feed. While there are lots of ways to create an RSS feed including manually coding one's on RSS feed, there are now several tools that offer this functionality that are much less time consuming for the feed owner. This is where audio hosting comes into play. There are dozens, probably even hundreds of options for websites that will host your audio either for free or at a cost and will automatically create your RSS feed. I tried several different hosting companies to see which was the best fit. In the end there were two important factors for me in making this decision. They were price and Dynamic Ad Insertion. As a young company, cost is of course an important factor to keep in sight. I looked for hosting options that were cost effective while keeping in mind that I may need to spend some money in order to make sure the necessary functions were there. I considered any hosting service that cost less than \$70 per month.

Most audio hosting services are closer to \$15 per month or less. Some are even free. But I came to view Dynamic Ad Insertion as a key functionality and as a relatively new technology, it was not cheap. Ultimately I tried and paid for three different hosting services. In the end, I settled on Red Circle because they're free and they offer Dynamic Ad Insertion. This is the service I currently use.

## Custom Domain Hosting

After deciding on an audio hosting provider, my next step was to setup a custom domain for my RSS feed. I learned in working with the PRX training team that setting up a custom domain that would essentially redirect my RSS feed data to the new domain could save me time and money down the road and would prevent

me from losing subscribers if I were to change hosting providers. A loss in subscribers can come if you change your RSS feed and your hosting company doesn't offer redirecting or a podcatcher is somehow still pointing to the RSS feed of the old company. To avoid this entirely, creating a custom domain for your feed allows you to submit a custom URL that you host and own as your RSS feed. This way if you need to change hosting providers you can just change where the customer redirects points rather than trying to submit a new RSS for to all of the podcast distributors or trusting the company whose service you're no longer paying for to continue redirecting your old feed to a new feed indefinitely. I used a service called Feedpress to accomplish this at just \$4/month per feed.

## Distribution

After having acquired an RSS feed and redirecting it to a custom domain, the next step is distributing the show on all the various platforms. Most will listen to their favorite podcasts in a podcatcher like Pocketcasts or Apple Podcasts or Google Podcasts. These platforms are made specifically for listening to podcasts and each provide a unique listening experience. While all podcasts have the ability to play podcasts more or less equally, different listening platforms have their own specific rules for submission. As a part of the Google Podcast creators program, I learned how to submit our shows to the following platforms:

Google Podcasts

TuneIn

Spotify

Stitcher

Pocket Casts

Deezer

Apple Podcasts

RadioPublic

Many podcatchers will automatically pull a show into their platform if the podcast is available in Apple Podcasts. But most of the options listed above have their own submission process. While ultimately I completed this process on my

own, I got lots of guidance from YouTube, and audio organizations on where to submit the show. I did find, however, that lots of this information is available when you look it up, but it was nice having the convenience of these instructions all laid out. *The Colored Girl Beautiful* is currently available wherever one listens to podcasts and is released on a bi-weekly schedule.

## Website

While download statics show that most listeners will listen on their mobile device, browser listening is still a big draw. In order to make use of this knowledge, I've created individual episode pages for each episode of *The Colored Girl Beautiful* on at <https://www.coloredgirlbeautiful.com>. There also always the latest episode available to listen to directly from the homepage.

The design of the website was made to be simple and to focus users primarily on listening to the show. While other information is made available, the bulk of the page is focused on the logo and the media player. Visitors can also listen to previous episodes, view our press kit, and purchase a t-shirt.

[\[Appendix K – Website Screenshot\]](#)

## Transcripts

In order to make *The Colored Girl Beautiful* accessible, we've opted to include transcripts for each episode. Some sighted listeners may also enjoy reading through the transcripts. These transcripts are available on each episode page in the form of a linked pdf file.

To provide this resource I use a service called Otter.ai. It's normally used for transcribing spoken meeting notes into words for notetaking purposes. Currently

the service is offered with 600 minutes per month for free. While the transcripts will undoubtedly need some cleaning up, it's much less tedious than having to transcribe all 30 minutes of an episode manually.

[\[Transcript – S1E1 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How to Be a Beautiful Colored Girl\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E2 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How to Heal the Colored Girl Beautiful\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E3 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Liberating the Colored Girl Beautiful\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E4 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How the Colored Girl Beautiful Finds Purpose\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E5 The Colored Girl Beautiful – The Colored Mother Beautiful\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E6 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Loss in the Life of the Colored Girl Beautiful\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E7 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Google Podcasts creators Program Showcase Audio\]](#)

[\[Transcript – S1E8 The Colored Girl Beautiful – The Colored Girl Beautiful Learns to Love Herself\]](#)

# Outcome

## Personal Reactions

For me, producing this podcast can be best described as cathartic. I didn't realize what strong feelings I have about perceptions of me as a Black woman. I didn't realize that it would be so meaningful for me that so many of the limitations and restrictions placed on Black women today in terms of behavior are the same sorts of things that Black women were facing over a hundred years ago. I see those same limitations in myself, in other Black women I know, and I even see it playing out in the media I consume. I'm glad that I'm able to share these questions and concerns with other Black women. The process has been truly eye-opening. I feel very fortunate to be able to do this sort of work. Not only do I find it interesting, but it drives me. It's hard work for sure but it's good work that I enjoy.

Over the course of the show I've shared lots of myself with the world. This work has been deeply personal. Not only do I have feelings about what's expected of Black women out in the world, but I've made those feelings indefinitely public. There's something both freeing and terrifying about exposing so much of oneself. But I do not have any regrets so far. I've gotten so much wonderful feedback about this process that I couldn't have imagined doing it any other way.

This process has also made me appreciate my therapist that much more. It's pushed me to do more work on myself and to be vocal about that work. It's encouraged me to be open about normalizing it. I've also felt it necessary to encourage others to be open about therapy as well. And while therapy isn't an option for all of us, self-reflecting and moving toward healthier relationships and boundaries is an option for everyone. I feel good about contributing to that

message that people get from the show. Although this is not something always discussed outright, the women featured are comfortable with growing and learning about themselves and/or being honest about who they are, even if only for this one story.

One of the things I enjoy most about storytelling is hearing a deeply heartfelt story. I love when I can feel the emotions of the storyteller—when the way the story is told makes me see what the storyteller is seeing and hear what the storyteller hears. I'm proud to have created that sort of content and put it out into the world.

### Listener Feedback

Since the show aired in October of 2019, we've gotten listener feedback from several different sources. We've gotten long emails from listeners with their thoughts and reactions. We've received texts from friends and family with their feedback. Most notably, the show currently has an average 5-star rating on Apple Podcasts with a total of 28 ratings comprised of 27 five-star ratings, three of which also contain positive reviews, and 1 four-star rating. While there are some critiques, the feedback for the show has been overwhelmingly positive. I was even contacted by the podcast section of the New York Times to have the show featured in an article about new shows being released. By and large, listeners seem to enjoy the show.

[\[Appendix L – Listener Feedback & Acknowledgements\]](#)

### Areas for Expansion

The creation of this show was good hard work that I am most certainly proud of. I set out to compare Madame Hackley's views on the behavior of Black women to

those of Black women today and was able to do that in a fun and engaging way. I went over each of the original topics I intended to discuss and was able to cover a few more as well. In future seasons, I'd like to explore the possibility of hearing about these same topics from more Black women. I'd also like the opportunity to speak with some scholars and thought leaders about Madame Hackley's work. Madame Hackley was a member of what would have been considered the Black elite and it would be interesting to hear what today's thought leaders have to say. I've gotten in touch with Dr. Lisa Pertillar-Brevard, for example, who wrote the most complete and thorough book I believe to be available about Madame Hackley and am hoping to speak more with her about Madame Hackley's life. There's much to explore on this topic and I am planning to have content for many seasons to come with this show!

# Next Steps

## *The Colored Girl Beautiful* – Season Two

The most immediate next step for the show will be to start production of season two. Currently it's scheduled to air in the late summer to early fall of 2020. Production planning will begin in mid-April. Season two will also bring with it a major overhaul of the show's promotion efforts in order to increase download numbers. We are in the process of planning a mini media blitz. In addition to the regular social media posts announcing season two's release and posting regularly or each episode, there will be emails sent to various media outlets and podcast review sites encouraging them to listen to and review the show. If they end up liking the show, these companies could potentially write reviews or include the show in a listicle that drives more downloads and subscriptions. Another important aspect of growth for the show will be community engagement which will require a targeted social media plan on Twitter and Instagram. While all of the specifics have not yet been planned out, this will certainly include more social media posts with content my audience would find useful or entertaining as opposed to only posting when a new episode is released.

## Republishing *The Colored Girl Beautiful*

A short-term goal after season two is complete would be to start the work of republishing the original text of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. Because the book was published in 1916 the text is not under copyright. This means that the book can be republished freely. I've also searched several of the available options and none of them are particularly aesthetically pleasing and some are even difficult to read because they've been so poorly typeset. In the down time after production is complete will be an ideal time to take on this project. This work has already started and would ideally be complete no later than January of 2021 if not sooner.

## Enhanced Version of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*

As a long-term goal I would like to write my own book about this process and about this book. There was a lot for me to uncover about myself over the course of this project much of which I think other Black women will find helpful. I'll definitely be working toward that within the next two years. Over the course of the Google Podcasts creators program, I've encountered lots of people in the marketing industry as well as a few in publishing as well. I will be reaching out to those contacts and looking for new ones on order to better understand how to best move forward.

# Acknowledgements

This project was the most difficult and rewarding thing I've ever done. It is my proudest accomplishment to date, and I could not have gotten here without help! A huge thank you to my thesis committee Jeanne Fountain, T.J. O'Donnell, and Tiffany Parkman, along with Megan Ree, my program advisor, whose editing and encouragement and guidance kept me striving to produce my best work. A special thanks to my committee chair, Jeanne Fountain who, no-doubt, read my paper more than anyone in all of its various stages—even the messy first ones! An extra special thank you to Kim Fox who was especially helpful to me during the early stages of this project and encouraged me to keep doing the work and making it better. A huge, heart-felt thank you to Nichole, my producer, who is one of the most amazing and talented women I know and who has been a never-ending supply of positive energy from the day we met. And a huge thank you to the training team at PRX who believed in my idea and chose my podcast for the first cohort of the Google Podcasts creators program and continue to be a support and a resource. And finally, thank you to my friends and family who listened to me whine about writing the longest piece of work I've ever created and helped me see it through to the end! I am forever grateful for your love and kindness to me!

I would not have been able to do this work without all of you. I cannot express enough gratitude for your continued patience and belief in this work. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Jeanne Fountain  
T.J. O'Donnell  
Tiffany Parkman  
Megan Rhee

Kim Fox  
Nichole Hill  
PRX Training Team



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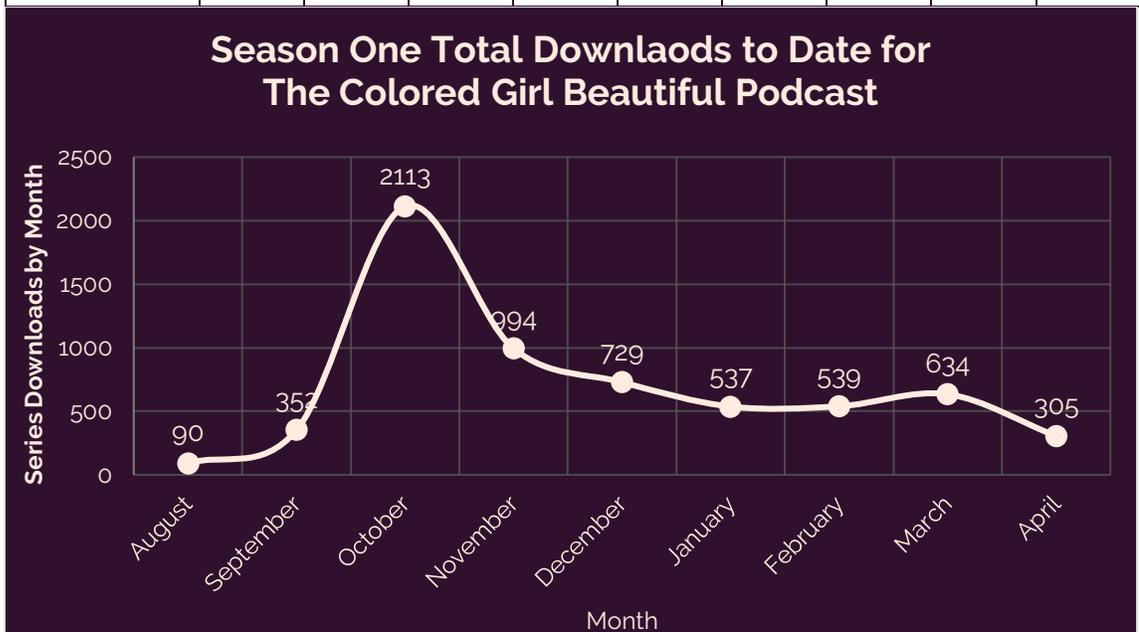
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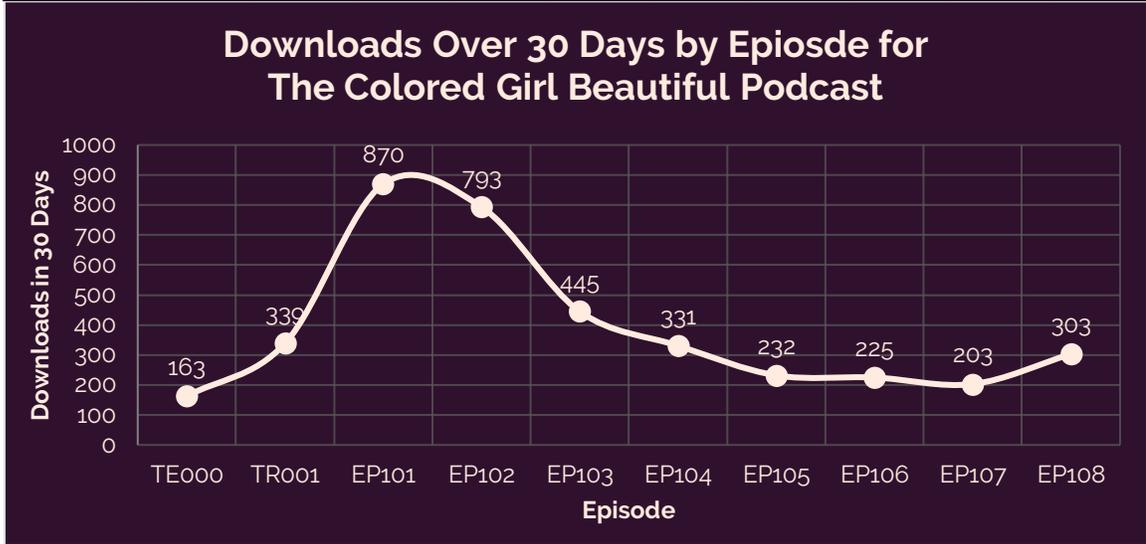
# Appendix B – Downloads Charts

Below is a short summary of all episode downloads for season one and downloads over 30 days for season one of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. Note that in August and September a short trailer and teaser ran respectively which are not technically part of the season. Episode one aired in October.

Episode #	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Number of Downloads	90	351	2113	994	729	537	539	634	305



Episode #	TE00	TR01	EP101	EP102	EP103	EP104	EP105	EP106	EP107	EP108
# of Downloads	163	339	870	793	445	331	232	225	203	303



# Appendix C – Deliverables

To listen to season one of *The Colored Girl Beautiful* podcast, all episodes can be found at the following link. Transcripts for episodes one through eight are also included below. All available episodes, including bonus content and new seasons can be found wherever podcasts are available including the following podcatchers by searching *The Colored Girl Beautiful*:

- Pocket Casts
- Google Podcasts
- Apple Podcasts
- Stitcher
- TuneIn Radio

## Individual Episode Links

1. Teaser - Coming Soon: The Colored Girl Beautiful Podcast
  - <https://swiy.io/t000>
2. Trailer – The Colored Girl Beautiful Podcast
  - <https://swiy.io/t001>
3. How to Be a Beautiful Colored Girl
  - <https://swiy.io/t101>
4. How to Heal the Colored Girl Beautiful
  - <https://swiy.io/t102>
5. Liberating the Colored Girl Beautiful
  - <https://swiy.io/t103>
6. How the Colored Girl Beautiful Finds Purpose
  - <https://swiy.io/t104>
7. The Colored Mother Beautiful
  - <https://swiy.io/t105>
8. Loss in the Life of the Colored Girl Beautiful
  - <https://swiy.io/t106>
9. Google Podcasts creators program Showcase
  - <https://swiy.io/t107>
10. The Colored Girl Beautiful Learns to Love Herself
  - <https://swiy.io/t108>

## Transcript – S1E1 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How to Be a Beautiful Colored Girl

Aseloka: Hi, Azalia. Hey, Azalia. Dear Azalia. Okay, yeah. Dear Azalia, this is a little weird for me. I've wanted to talk to you for a while about this book you wrote for black women. And for a long time I couldn't figure out how because, well, you died over a hundred years ago. But I heard about your book in grad school and was honestly astonished to learn that a black woman had written and published a book like this in 1916.

Aseloka: Slavery and the civil rights movement make up most of what I've learned about black history. The only thing I really knew about black folks in the time period between those two really big events is that we suffered a lot. So, imagine my surprise at discovering a woman like you, Madam Emma Azalia Hackley born into the black elite of Detroit. The same year Howard University was founded.

Aseloka: You were a jet setter and a diva who did exactly what you wanted to do. I read that you eloped against your family's wishes, founded the Colored Woman's League and earned a bachelor's degree in music. In 1905 you traveled without your husband to Paris to study and train as a classical vocalist. And you became sought after the world over. Then you just walked away from all of it.

Aseloka: You spent the rest of your life traveling across the Jim Crow South delivering talks to young black women. And what you learned about love, and community and the endless potential of the black race. Then you put all those talks together into a book called The Colored Girl Beautiful. That's why I am writing to you.

Aseloka: But for so much of my life I've felt like I wasn't being a black woman in the right way. I mean, I picked up on how people expected black women

to behave and present, but I didn't exactly buy into it. As a kid I spent a lot of energy trying to make sense of it all. Then as an adult, I found your book and started reading your advice to black women about how we should carry ourselves and what we should believe about ourselves.

Aseloka: And I thought, "This is it. A book of instructions on how to be a black woman from this liberated black woman who is doing what wants and living her best life." There was so much pride, and certainty and hope for black people, for black women, especially in your writing. I remember reading your book and feeling more and more encouraged and seen until all of a sudden I didn't.

Aseloka: Oh, before we go any further, I should probably introduce myself. I'm Aseloka. This is The Colored Girl Beautiful. A heartfelt letter from one beautifully juxtaposed black woman to another.

Aseloka: So, I was talking to my producer, Nichole about my black lady coming of age story and the role that your writing played. And for context, I wanted to share some of that story with you. This is Nichole and I are discussing the recording conditions in my home studio.

Aseloka: Somebody is doing a house party right now.

Nichole: Oh yeah, My next door neighbor is a DJ.

Aseloka: Why now? Why [inaudible 00:04:10]-

Aseloka: Nicole asked me about the first person I looked up to for guidance on how to exist in the world. And that was, as you may have guessed, my mother.

Aseloka: My mother, she had a beautiful voice, a beautiful deep alto voice, big strong voice. She was a pastor of a very small church. She was a loving woman, but was also very firm, very strict. But she was this fiercely kind but firm person who I admire deeply.

Aseloka: I not only wanted to be like her, I wanted her to be happy with me. Even when I was upset with her or mad at her, I still way deep down wanted her to be pleased with me and to be proud of the things that I was doing. I did a lot of following her around. I watched her put on her makeup in the bathroom before she went to church. And fussing over her hair and making sure that it was the exact way that she wanted it.

Aseloka: She liked it big, like Tina Turner big, she loved Tina Turner. And I don't know that I always realized this about myself, but I love big curly hair. I love to wear my afro out. It's annoying because it's hot, and it's huge and it gets tangled. But I love the way it looks. I will suffer through all of that for the aesthetic benefit that it provides me.

Aseloka: But I think that's something that I got from her that she did not outwardly encourage me to do. But it was something that was so much a part of her that it just kind of rubbed off on me.

Aseloka: Before she passed away my mother shared some very clear instructions on how to be a good girl. Good girls were Christlike, respectful, quiet, modest. She instructed me that a good girl should always present well. I can't say that these rules felt right to me, but I did internalize them heavily and they shaped much of the way that I viewed the world.

Aseloka: Now, when it came to how to be black, there was no instruction spoken or otherwise. It just never came up. It was something I had to sort of intuit, which for me was tricky to figure out.

Aseloka: It felt much more cryptic, how to be black. I know I picked up on things, I was just noticing differences. I was noticing like how black people behaved and dressed. And the type of music, that was a big one. The type of music that black people listened to versus the music that white people listened to.

Aseloka: My white friends were listening to the Spice Girls, and Sarah McLaughlin and like, you know. It was a very stark difference. I recognize like, “Oh, this is a thing that we don't do.” Even though, like, I noticed like only black people do this and only white people do this, I liked all of it. So, my mother did not permit secular music in our house. So, my first non gospel album was Jagged Little Pill by Alanis Morissette.

Aseloka: And the best part is that I acquired it because I traded my God's Property CD for it with the granddaughter of one of my mom's friends.

Nichole: You're like, I don't need this. Get this Kirk Franklin, here you go, do whatever you need to do with that. I need this Jagged Little Pill right now.

Aseloka: That was my foray into secular.

Nichole: And what do you think and how was it?

Aseloka: Oh my God. First of all, to this day, I can sing literally all of the words to all of the songs on that album.

Nichole: How are you listening to this without getting caught?

Aseloka: On a Discman in my room at night under the covers.

Nichole: Interesting.

Aseloka: In complete secrecy. Because if my mom had any idea, oh my God.

Nichole: Did you think, “I'm doing something ...” Not only so ... Okay, so you're doing something that's secular, did you also think, “I'm doing something that's not black.”

Aseloka: Yes. Oh my God, yes. I didn't tell any of my black friends.

Nichole: Did you do things to make up for that? That you felt like would make you more black?

Aseloka: So, I didn't really want to make up for it. At the time I just, I kind of wanted to play both sides.

Aseloka: I wanted it to be okay to do the black things and also the not so black things. But to me, at the time it felt like that wasn't allowed. It felt like I absolutely had to be in one camp or the other. And my solution was to sort of learn how to exist in both worlds by being black enough for the black kids and not too black for the white kids. And I will say there was some shame about being black.

Aseloka: I didn't want to be too black in high school. Like if anything I was, in trying to sort of toe the line, I was dialing back my blackness.

Nichole: What other things were too black and how did you learn that those things were too black?

Aseloka: Mostly music videos. I didn't want to be too loud. Oh, the black girl attitude. You couldn't have too much for attitude because that's unacceptable. I very specifically avoided big hoop earrings. Those are very black. I have a very vivid memories of like going into Claire's and actively rejecting hoop earrings. I was like, oh no, I can't be that black girl.

Aseloka: That shame I'd grown up with started to fade once I started meeting black people and particularly black women who weren't following all of those rules that I'd grown to believe were set in stone about how to be a good girl or how to be black. These women spoke their minds. They listened to whatever kind of music they wanted to, and they wore their blackness with pride.

Aseloka: Now, admittedly, in the beginning, I may have taken things a little too far with the black pride thing. And then once I got to college, I was like, "I'm going to be ..." I bought the biggest [crosstalk 00:11:47] ... Yes. The

biggest hoop earrings I could find. I don't remember where I bought them. I probably was at Claire's.

Aseloka: But, I remember seeing them and just being like, "You know what? No. I'm not going to be ashamed." Of course none of this I said out loud. But in my head I'm like, "I'm going to wear these and it's going to be amazing. I'm going to be so proud to wear these earrings." I felt like I was showing my former self and everyone who had known me up until then like, "No, I am black and it's fine."

Nichole: You're like, singing the black national anthem as you buy the earrings, "With every voice-"

Aseloka: They're like, "Ma'am singing, could you just, could you pay now?"

Aseloka: You know, the pendulum just swung in the other direction. Because by then I was just like, why have I been hiding this all the time? I think what sparked it was being in college, obviously. Being around this whole new set of black people who have all of these different experiences, very different from mine, who didn't grow up in very white West Virginia like I did.

Aseloka: It completely changed my perspective. It changed everything about what I felt like it meant to be black. Eventually I settled into like, okay, we don't have to hide being black. We also don't have to force it on people. I came around to the conclusion that I am a black person and the things that I like as a person, that's black enough, whatever that is. There's no too black or not black enough. Who I am and the things that I like as I am is sufficiently black.

Aseloka: When I started reading *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, I was sure I'd found a book that could be passed along to every little black girl to help her

grow up thoughtful, and self-assured and hopefully avoid that period of time that I went through where I felt confused and ashamed.

Aseloka: I found it really intriguing that she spoke of black women as being the bone and sinew of our race. Of being so essential, so important to the black race, to our community that we couldn't, as a race we could not survive without black women. That we should be proud of our heritage.

Aseloka: When for me, I hadn't really thought a whole lot about my heritage. And what I did know wasn't positive. I didn't even know a lot. And then what I did know, I felt like, "Well, what I can be sure of is that I came from slaves." The idea that I have something to be proud of, that black women, black people have something to be proud of, was beautiful.

Aseloka: You know, when I read those things in this book, I just thought about like, "Man, if these had been things that I had known, how different would I be? How much less would I have struggled? How much more would I have been accepting of who I am if I had known these things as a child?"

Nichole: So, what were the pieces in the book as you kept reading that kind of didn't sit so well with you?

Aseloka: Yeah. So, as I started to read, I realized that this book is, it's very sort of telling of the era. There was a lot of what I felt was oppressive language for women. You know, she's got this quote in there about to only be conspicuous by quietness, which is essentially just saying like, people should not notice you except when they notice how quiet you are.

Nichole: What?

Aseloka: That's just all kinds of backwards to me.

Nichole: Why?

- Aseloka: I know that there's nothing inherently different or wrong about my opinions just because I am a woman. And the suggestion that people don't need to hear from me is offensive.
- Nichole: Why do you think she was writing like that? Why do you think she suggested that?
- Aseloka: I mean, if I'm being reasonable, I think her concern was the wellbeing of black people overall. She lived in a time where if you were talking back to a white person, you could die. If you weren't seen as respectable, presentable, you could literally lose your life. And I think she wanted us to live. I don't think thriving necessarily was at the top of her list.
- Aseloka: What I know that time is that there was a lot of controversy about sort of what the best way to move forward was racially. Do we just do everything the white man says and then they'll accept us and then it'll be fine? Which is sort of the respectability line of thought. Or the talented 10th notion, that if there's just 10% of the black population who is meant to sort of be the exemplary group that will uplift the rest of us into a place where the white man can now accept us.
- Aseloka: Or do we focus on learning a trade, and working and building something for ourselves, and let that be the way that we move ourselves forward? By learning and doing everything that we can on our own. So there was a lot of controversy about what was sort of the right way.
- Aseloka: And what I see in Emma Azalia Hackley's writing is that she sort of took the respectability route. You can just see it, you can feel it reading her book.
- Nichole: So, why not just kind of write it off? If you have these deep kind of discomfort with some of her thinking, why not write it off?

Aseloka: Yeah. I think what intrigues me so much is that what I see in Emma Azalia Hackley is this complex layered person. Because there is good in this book. There are some wonderful, beautiful things, again, that I would have loved to hear growing up. I don't believe it makes sense to just throw everything out because of that. I think there is enough good in this book to make it worth reading. I think there's also plenty in this book that should be questioned.

Aseloka: But I appreciate sort of that full picture. I mean, that's what I see, what's what I hear when I read this book, is this whole person with what seems to be conflicting views about how to be.

Aseloka: You know, Azalia, that layered, complex nuance in your writing is what drew me to you. So much of what we've learned about how to be black women, particularly in America, is still rooted in lessons about survival. And in order to survive, we have needed to be acceptable to society at large while still creating our own sense of black community at home.

Aseloka: I'm grateful to women like you and my mother who followed these guidelines in order to give me a better life. Now that I have a better life, I want to live mine a little differently. I want to learn how to thrive, not just survive. I want to be well, and whole, and healed and not live from a place of fear. Azalia, studying your life and the complex and nuanced way you wrote and lived has been an incredible help to me as I work on figuring all of that out.

Aseloka: In my 33 years I feel like what I've learned is that people are complex. We are layered human beings. What I feel like I always want to fight for is the idea that I am more than one thing. I am not just black. I am not

just a woman. I'm not just a daughter. I'm not just a sister. I'm not just a friend. I am all of these things.

Aseloka: They all have some significance to me. I think that there's something to learn from the things that she says. I want to honor that. I want to acknowledge and honor that.

Aseloka: I've been talking with other black women about your advice on navigating black womanhood and listening to them reflect on their own beautiful and complicated stories. I'd like to share them with you in the form of letters starting with this one.

Aseloka: This season I'll tell you stories that have resonated with me about how much has and hasn't changed in the lives of black women since you wrote your book. I can't wait for you to hear them and we'll talk again soon. Sincerely, Aseloka.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful is created and hosted by me Aseloka Smith. This episode was written and produced by Nichole Hill. Music from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalia is your favorite auntie who's always happy to see you at the cookout and gives you a big bear hug.

Aseloka: We'll be back with a new episode on October 15th. We would love to stay connected with you. Visit us at [coloredgirlbeautiful.com](http://coloredgirlbeautiful.com). Our website is a one stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media and staying in touch.

Aseloka: If you've read The Colored Girl Beautiful and want to write your own letter to Azalia, send it to us. We would love audio clips, but we'll take written letters and emails too. We may even feature your letter on a future episode.

Aseloka: If you like what you hear, please give the show a five star rating on Podchaser and Apple podcasts. Links in the show notes. We're a brand new show, so any support you can give really, really help.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX and the Google Podcast Creators Program. We'll see you in two weeks.

Aseloka: At some point. I also acquired ... I liked, really liked Sheryl Crow. Every Day Is a Winding Road was like, oh my God. It was like, yes. (singing)

Nichole: (singing) Oh my God. I love that song.

## Transcript – S1E2 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How to Heal the Colored Girl Beautiful

Nichole: Okay, so you find this really cool lady, you trick her into hanging out with you, what did you guys talk about?

Aseloka: I did not trick her into hanging out with me. I stalked her on Instagram.

Nichole: Amazing. Great, best practice.

Aseloka: Right?

Aseloka: Azalia, I want to tell you about this amazing artist that I met named Precious and a conversation that she and I had about friendships, and the difficulties of starting and staying in them. But what really stuck out to me about our conversation was why Precious felt a little bit more comfortable keeping some of her heavier emotions to herself.

Aseloka: What you're about to hear is my producer, Nichole and I, debriefing some of that conversation.

Nichole: Okay. Okay, so who's Precious?

Precious: I'm an artist, a visual journalist, a visual journalist by way of illustration and portraiture. I'm really interested and passionate about

storytelling, as well as capturing people's experiences through written work and visual work.

Aseloka: She just seemed very put together, but also really cool. She's got these really gorgeous locks and these fun glasses. I don't know, she's beautiful, but she just seems like someone who's very free spirited, but also grounded. She's just very intelligent and have all these really well-thought out things to say. But my overall impression of her was that she was just super cool. I remember wanting to hang out with her like, "Oh, she would be cool to hang out with."

Nichole: Yeah. So this is just an excuse.

Aseloka: Yeah, it's basically just an excuse to hang out with somebody cooler than me.

Precious: What brings me joy is chocolate. Lovely answer. Salted caramel chocolate, in particular. Solitude, actually, laughter and being at home and whole at once really brings me joy. So, I'm chasing that and getting a little bit of it now.

Aseloka: I had originally wanted to talk about sort of that relationship aspect and sort of the interaction between friends, but the conversation shifted to an area I wasn't really expecting.

Nichole: Really?

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: Say more. What'd you all end up talking about?

Aseloka: So, we ended up talking about how about this sort of desire to be perceived as someone who has it all together that we both share. I don't know, I hadn't expected that in a conversation about friendship.

Precious: My friend the other day, I've been kind of MIA for the past two weeks and she was like, "I've been thinking about you, you all right?" I'm like,

“I'm just going through it, and I don't want to bring my bad energy around other folks, I'd rather just try to figure it out on my own and then come out fresh and new and like I have my entire life together.”

Also this person, I was like, “I know they're going through way more than what I'm going through. I have no right to say I'm upset or sad when they're going through so much right now, right?”

Precious: They were like, “That's not true. I want to know what's going on and that's what I'm here for. I'm here to help, I'm here to just listen.” So that was super nice. Sometimes little things like that, when I don't have the energy to get out of my house, hence that's why we're here. Just checking in on me, that's nice. But it's hard, because I want to be the person that has their shit together and has my life together and there's nothing wrong. I'm happy, I'm fine, everything's great.

Aseloka: In my mind when you're with your friends, you're having fun, you're hanging out, you share everything together, you know everything about each other and you're not afraid to have these really big deep conversations. So, it hadn't dawned on me that that's something that we would encounter in our conversation about friends.

Nichole: Right.

Precious: I think with some of my friendships, it was also a lack of showing emotion between each other, even with other women as well. Because we wanted to say that we had all of our shit together, we wanted to come to the table as strong, independent people, instead of it being like, “I'm having a real moment right now and right now I can't uplift anybody else, not even myself.”

Aseloka: Hi Azalia. It's Aseloka, and this is The Colored Girl Beautiful. A heartfelt letter from one generation of black women in search of healing to another.

Nichole: How important is it to you, how valuable is that label of being a strong black woman to you? How much does that mean?

Aseloka: Oh my gosh. I don't know that I knew this before, but it was very important to me. Even if I couldn't have articulated it, this idea that I don't show that I'm hurting and I don't show that I need help. If I look back on how I've behaved, it has been absolutely essential. Asking people for help is a last resort. I will try everything I can on my own before I'll even suggest to anyone that anything might be off or I need any sort of assistance.

Nichole: Yeah, I get that. I feel like you look in the mirror, for me, I look in the mirror and even though I know and I resent the strong black woman label, it's almost a little bit like a prison. It is like, but I am a strong black woman.

Aseloka: I mean, because there's a sense of pride. Even though I don't want to be confined by that idea, I do want to be perceived that way.

Nichole: Yes.

Aseloka: I want people to look at me and feel like, "Yes, I can do all the things."

Nichole: Yep.

Aseloka: Even though I know that that's not really healthy, it's not a good idea. So I have this conversation with Precious, I'm going over the tape in my head, I'm thinking about all the things that we've talked about and am wondering about this idea of keeping it all together and why someone would do that, and thinking to myself, "Oh, I wouldn't do that." But then I thought, "Wait, have I done that?" So, I decided to call up

Dominique and ask her what her perception was of me as I was going through a really difficult time in my life.

Nichole: Dom is ... how long have you two been friends?

Aseloka: Dom and I have been friends for 23 years.

Nichole: Oh, wow.

Aseloka: I am 33.

Nichole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So most of your life.

Aseloka: For most of our lives.

Nichole: Yeah.

Aseloka: We consider one another family at this point.

Dominique: Hello?

Aseloka: Hello again.

Dominique: Hello again.

Aseloka: So, I asked Dominique what she perceived about how I was doing. No, listen, I've gone twice since we were on the phone.

Dominique: Oh.

Aseloka: Well, that sounds fine. You've known me for a really long time, you knew me when I was going through a really difficult point in my life. At this point, both of my parents have passed, but particularly after my mother passed away and I had this sort of big life shift where my sister came to live with me and I was managing my family's finances and my mother's estate and trying to keep my sister and I afloat, because she came into my legal guardianship and was grieving at the same time and was caring for a grieving teenager. Everything just sort of got flipped upside down for me. But you knew me during this time and I'm just curious about what your perception of me was when all these things were happening?

Dominique: At the time, I knew you were grieving, but I didn't realize the scope of it and I don't think that we talked about those things. I honestly had never known someone that had dealt with something like that, so I'm not sure that I knew how to reach out or be supportive or be available to you in that way. I remember having conversations with our other friends about it, like, "Wow, she's going through a lot, I can't imagine something like that."

Dominique: But again, I still had a limited knowledge of that grieving and then taking on added responsibility during that grieving. You didn't ask for anything more than what you had always looked for in our friendship, I guess. It seemed like you were dealing with it in your way. From my perspective, it didn't seem like things were falling apart.

Dominique: I had no idea how it impacted you.

Dominique: I don't think you talked about your sister moving in and trying to help her through any of it and taking on that responsibility. I don't remember discussing anything about the finances. So I just didn't know the scope of it all, and I don't think that you allowed us to see that side either.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Dominique: Maybe it's because we hadn't experienced anything similar, I'm not sure. So, I've always known you to be a strong person and I literally hate saying that, because I know that it comes with so much neglect of the strong person, or disregard for their feelings. But I've always known you to take on extra things, you work extra hard. Even from a very young age, you had extra things, extracurricular activities, you had volunteering, you had piano lessons. I think you were in AP classes, I don't know.

Aseloka: I was.

Dominique: You were always doing extra things, and then you took on a lot of responsibility, I think, with your sister. Even when your parents were still around and then as your mother was ailing, you took on responsibility at home. So, I've always known you to be a strong person and a person that did more than any of us did as children. I guess that image of you was kind of burned in my mind. Also, when your mother passed, that strong person that just takes on what needs to be taken on and pushes through it.

Aseloka: Yeah. It's wild even to me that I put so much effort into holding it all in and keeping it all together, that it was literally imperceptible to the people who were closest to me.

Dominique: Yeah, yeah.

Nichole: But you find *The Color Girl Beautiful*, you're reading *The Color Girl Beautiful* and reading it. Can you read me the passage?

Aseloka: Oh, yeah. Let's see.

Nichole: Oh no, did you lose it?

Aseloka: I did lose it. Hold, please. Oh, no, here it is, here it is. Good begets good. "So she, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, will exert herself to make a wide circle of friends, although she will be careful not to grow too intimate with any. She may be a real friend without undue intimacy." My knee jerk reaction is like, no, you want intimacy in your friendships.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: Then I think back to this conversation that I've had with Dominique about how I wasn't being completely forthcoming. I was withholding intimacy and I don't know why.

Nichole: Why are we doing this?

Aseloka: What is the matter?

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: What's going on? With someone with whom I am extremely close.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: She says she didn't even know how much I was struggling.

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: Which is wild, because I felt like I was falling apart.

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: I thought I was going to lose it. I thought I would, I mean, burst into a million pieces. I was sad, I was hurting just a lot of the time. I miss my mom.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: Above all, I just miss my mom.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: So the fact that I didn't show any of that, I can't even wrap my head around it.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: I don't think that there was anything about our communication that was different than it had been prior. I mean, I can say for sure that I put a lot of effort into presenting well and trying to just keep it all together, trying to keep from falling apart. But looking back, it's just like, how is that even possible?

Nichole: Does it make you think any less of your friendship with her when you look back and you think of the things you weren't showing her?

Aseloka: It doesn't make me think less of the friendship. I mean, at any point, I would have told you that we were super close, through any of that, but it's definitely not what it could have been. I don't even know why I felt

so compelled to keep things from her or from anyone else that I was close to. I don't know why I felt like I couldn't share, but it felt very much like this was my burden to bear alone.

Nichole: Wow.

Nichole: Part of this disconnect it's sounding like, in between the intimacy and friendships and this desire to want to seem really strong, is not just ego or bravado, it's about this healing process of needing to deal with this pain and needing to learn how to reevaluate what you're looking at and the reality of your life, that you do have these friends and these people who love you. What was it like for Precious? How did she go through that process?

Precious: Healing is a lifelong journey and there's really no quick fix for it. I think when I was in really bad place, I was like, "Well, I've got to start doing yoga, right? Or writing in a journal." Doing these small things that are helpful for some others. I was buying crystals and crystals actually are really important to me. Candles and plants and physical things in my life that are going to ... maybe if I change my physical part of my life and the things around me, it'll change what's in the inside. Some of those things have helped, but they haven't been sustainable.

Precious: So now I've kind of just learned to be more honest with myself and how I'm feeling. So now therapy's helpful to understand these patterns, but to know that it's okay to be still trusting myself and listening to my body in both the physical and spiritual sense. That's been helpful. Now do I do it all the time? No, but I'm aware of when I'm making that choice. Sometimes I haven't even been aware of it. Yeah.

Nichole: Yes, black ladies in therapy.

Aseloka: Black ladies in therapy. Oh my gosh, that's a podcast.

Nichole: Is it?

Aseloka: Therapy for Black Girls.

Nichole: Shout out.

Aseloka: Check it out, yeah.

Nichole: Can you talk to me about what it would look like for you to look in the mirror, you have that title of strong black woman and to take it off for the sake of intimacy in your friendships. How would you do that?

Aseloka: So, I've been in therapy for a while now and have been trying to figure that out. I feel like I've come a really long way, because it is something that, intellectually, I understand is important, but in practice is incredibly difficult.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: It's not something that I'm good at. But what I've learned, what I, excuse me, what I am learning.

Nichole: To be clear.

Aseloka: To be clear, because this is not a done deal, we're not all set as of today. But what I am learning is that it's a process, it's a deliberate decision every single time. I feel like maybe for some people, and this could just be my perception too, but maybe for some people, it's simple. There are people in your life who love you and when you fall, you fall into their arms and you know you're going to be fine. I am not one of those people.

Aseloka: All of my energy is spent trying to prevent myself from falling, because in my head, I'm like, "I don't know who's going to be there. I need to be all the answers to all the questions for myself at any given moment." But that's not great, that's not healthy.

Nichole: Yeah.

Aseloka: That's not-

Nichole: Is it true?

Aseloka: It's not true. That's what I think gets me about this whole thing, is that it wasn't until, at this point, both of my parents had passed away, and it wasn't until having that experience and having guardianship of my sister, that I realized that there are people in my life, the same people who have been there the whole time. This is not like, oh, all of a sudden, all my true friends showed their ... No, these people have been there the entire time. I'm just now realizing I can actually breathe a little bit with these people who already exist in my life, I can trust them.

Aseloka: Azalia, I know you weren't super excited about this idea of intimacy among friends, but building deep relationships with people I can trust has definitely made my life richer. I mean, I'm still finding my footing with this trust stuff. Trusting the people who love me to help me through life, trusting myself to know when I need help, but it's worth it for sure.

Aseloka: All right, that's enough soul searching for one day, I think, but let's do this again soon. Thanks for listening. Sincerely, Aseloka.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful was created and is hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was written and produced by Nichole Hill and Aseloka Smith, with music from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalia is the older woman who lives down the street and warns you about the same things your parents do, but for some reason you listen to her when she says it.

Aseloka: We'll be back with a new episode on October 29th. We want to know what you think about the show, so give us your feedback. Join our Flipchat group and tell us what you think about this week's episode, there's a link in the show notes. You can always visit us at [coloredgirlbeautiful.com](http://coloredgirlbeautiful.com). That's colored with an ed. Our website is a

one-stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media and staying in touch. If you like what you hear, please give the show a five star rating on Apple Podcast and Podchaser and tell all of your friends to do it too. Links in the show notes for that as well.

Aseloka: Of course, I have to say thank you to Precious for sharing your story with us, your authenticity and thoughtfulness are truly inspiring. A huge thank you to my dear friend Dominique for sharing your story as well. You are one of the many wonderful people in my life and I appreciate you being available to record on short notice.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX and the Google Podcast creators program. We'll see you in two weeks.

Nichole: I once did this improv scene. We were just flailing and I'd just come back from LA and we just did not know what to do, so then I just introduced crystals. I don't know anything about crystals, so I was like, "Here's a box of crystals, mom, just hold them, believe in them." I don't know anything-

Aseloka: Believe in them? Believe in them?

Nichole: I need to read up about crystals. They were everywhere. Obviously there's something to them, I need to learn about them.

Aseloka: Yeah, they're supposed to hold certain energies, depending on-

Nichole: The crystal?

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: Oh.

Aseloka: So, having them in your possession is supposed to sort of transfer that energy to you.

Nichole: This is so basic, but do you have to touch it to transfer it?

Aseloka: I think you do, I think you hold it.

Nichole: Oh, okay.

Aseloka: Yeah, or have it with you. Yeah.

Nichole: Okay.

Aseloka: Yeah, because people carry them around.

Nichole: Oh, okay.

Aseloka: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think, this is probably a stretch, I shouldn't say it I'm sure.

Nichole: Say it with confidence. You know everything about crystals, you are a crystal expert now.

Aseloka: I think that there are different kinds of crystals that carry different types of energy.

Nichole: Got it, got it.

Aseloka: I mean, I think.

Nichole: I will use all of this in my next improv.

Aseloka: Perfect.

Nichole: It's going to be great.

Aseloka: Glad it's useful.

### Transcript – S1E3 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Liberating the Colored Girl Beautiful

Aseloka: Azalia. Okay, we have to talk about appearance because I am all of my feelings about this chapter on appearance.

Nichole: Oh, do you have the passage that...

Aseloka: It's just the way you describe it? I don't know. It just makes it seem really heavy.

Cross Talking: [crosstalk 00:00:31] we have a couple of them that I highlighted-

Nichole: Yes, why don't you tell me about what Azalia had to say about that?

Aseloka: Oh, boy. Oh, Azalia. And listen, I like to look nice just as much as the next woman but this is the line.

Nichole: Where was the one where she says something about we have to, oh, there we go.

Aseloka: Oh, oh yeah, okay, this is the big one. I think this sort of gives a good overall point of view on what Azalia thinks about clothes.

Aseloka: We should be particular to give the best possible and most pleasing picture to others at all times. There should be no being caught. One should be prepared early in the morning, any time of day and all through the night.

Aseloka: Listen, I can't do that.

Nichole: But you have done it in the past.

Aseloka: I guess so.

Aseloka: So I realized in my conversation with Nichole that I had done that in the past. I had put lots of time and effort into making sure that I was presentable at all times. There was a point in my life where I put a great deal of effort into making sure that people were perceiving me a certain way and so I felt like I had to be on all of the time. And looking back on that now, that feels exhausting and I could not imagine keeping up with that today. But it did make me stop and think, why is that something we do and have I let it go entirely? Hm. Probably not.

Aseloka: Hey Azalia, it's Aseloka again, and this is the Colored Girl Beautiful, a heartfelt letter from one generation of black women seeking liberation to another.

Aseloka: So a colored girl should study her individuality and her life position and dress accordingly. Now this I could manage. This has more of a dress for success type vibe to me, which that makes sense, but the best possible, most pleasing picture? That feels like pressure.

Nichole: Girl, we have strayed far.

Aseloka: What do you think about that sentiment though? Is that something you generally agree with? Do you have thoughts about-

Nichole: No. Cutting you off, sorry, I'm sorry. No. Who did you find to talk to about all these interesting [inaudible 00:03:48]

Aseloka: I found the lovely Andrea. So when I was talking with Andrea, she has one of the best introductions that I have ever encountered in this, in all these interviews.

Nichole: Whoa, high bar.

Aseloka: Probably my favorite, yeah.

Andrea: My name is Andrea Renau .

Aseloka: And can you tell me something about who you are? Something that's important to you? Some people say what they do. Some people say something about their personality. You get to decide what that is, but something important about you.

Andrea: I want to say that I am a black woman. I don't want to say that I'm a teacher or a daughter or a friend. Those are things that anybody can be, but wasn't it Maya Angelou where she was like, "It's the most incredible thing to be born a black woman. If I were to be born again, I wouldn't want to be anything else."

Something like that. I might've made that up. I'm pretty sure  
Maya Angelou said that.

Aseloka: It sounds like something she would say.

Andrea: Yeah.

Aseloka: I buy that.

Andrea: Yeah.

Aseloka: We'll say that she said it.

Andrea: Maya Angelou said that.

Aseloka: You are a black woman.

Andrea: I'm a black woman.

Nichole: You two sound like you have a lot of fun together. Have you all  
hung out before?

Aseloka: We do. I didn't know that before I interviewed her because we  
hadn't... I knew her from church but we hadn't hung out before  
that. But it just so happens that she's just like, we get along really  
well, she's just like this super fun and also very open, wonderful  
chatty person.

Nichole: Like would you call her chatty?

Aseloka: Yeah, I mean we were chatty together.

Nichole: We have a hundred hour [inaudible 00:05:50].

Aseloka: That was obviously fueled by me. I take full responsibility.

Nichole: I'm not mad about it.

Aseloka: I'm not, I don't apologize. Andrea and I did have a lot of fun  
chatting and she had very strong opinions about what Madam  
[Hackley 00:06:05] had to say.

Andrea: You know, am I to the point where I'm wearing a bonnet in  
public? No. Am I passing judgment for people that do it now?

No. And I think that was a big step for me because I used to be like, “Oh my God, I can't believe you would leave the house in a bonnet.” But now I'm like, “I mean, I probably should be covering up this mess.” So no, she says you should always leave with like the best possible.

Aseloka: It says the best possible, most pleasing picture at all times.

Andrea: No, ma'am.

Aseloka: That's a lot. That's a lot of work.

Andrea: That's a whole lot.

Aseloka: I think that's definitely... Well okay, this is written in the 1900s-

Andrea: The early nineteen teens [inaudible 00:06:52]

Aseloka: So, one, we were barely out the slave game. Two, probably if you were out and black and looking less than, people were automatically going to be super nasty to you, but at least if you came out with some class you have that going for you.

Aseloka: Can you tell me what your general feelings are about personal appearance and if that's something that's important to you and why.

Andrea: That's a tough one. It's important to me in certain aspects. I don't wear makeup on a day-to-day basis. I don't really get my nails done anymore. And when I was it was just color and not anything crazy. I try and have my hair done but also I will throw on a scarf in the parking lot of my job and call it a day. So in that respect I'm like, “Whatever. I don't have time for this.” But then there are other parts of me that really desire to be this effortless, elegant beauty thing. I admire all the Instagram girls who are

always done and always just so clear and beautiful and put together.

Aseloka: It is absolutely fascinating to me that the concerns you expressed about how we present ourselves as black women and this push to be presentable is very similar to what we as black women are still concerned about today.

Andrea: I mean I think maybe the particulars have changed, but the overall idea still pretty much holds fast. Even when we understand perfectly the amount of effort that goes into looking your best all of the time, and yet we all have specific things that are particularly important to us.

Aseloka: What do you think makes one beautiful?

Andrea: Clear skin. Hair that looks cute. I think for black women, hair is like a tough one, especially with the past, I mean it's got to be at least 10 years now, the natural hair movement, so that's a tough one. I definitely try and make sure that my hair looks a certain way, but it's expensive and it's time consuming and it's a lot. But I will say that is something where you get the most compliments or you get people stopping and asking, "Who did your hair? Did you do it?" Or, "It looks really nice."

Aseloka: I definitely agree with Andrea about this and so I always wanted my hair to look a certain way. I've always had these very particular hair aspirations. Not only that, but I also have very vivid memories of my mom having these very strong attachments to what my hair should look like as well. My mother always made sure that my hair was done, but she did not allow me to relax it. So from probably zero to 12 maybe I never had a

perm in my hair, it was often in braids or she kept it pressed like with a hot comb.

Nichole: Oh, the hot comb.

Aseloka: We all remember the hot comb.

Nichole: Oh, God. Easter Sunday. "Mom, why are you burning my ear?"

Aseloka: So when I got to middle school, I very specifically remember this was middle school. I get to middle school and I want like the swoop bang, the long straight hair and I'm so jealous and I'm like beg and beg and beg my mom to let me relax my hair. She relents and I remember the first day that I went to school afterward and I just felt like I am the most special person in the whole world because my hair is straight now and to be able to have hair that I could flip, to have just a little bit of hang time, to be able to put it up in a ponytail you couldn't tell me nothing. You could not tell me anything.

Aseloka: Fast forward to high school, I'm flat ironing it, curling it every day, just trying to get the perfect hairstyle constantly, it's a big deal. My hair is a huge deal. So at some point at the crown of my head, all of that hair right in the middle broke off at the root. Anything that wasn't new growth was gone. And maybe, I don't know, I don't know if I had, I feel like I had permed it myself maybe. Yeah.

Nichole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). With like Just for Me?

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: Well you were beyond the Just for Me phase so it was probably-

Aseloka: Oh no, Dark and Lovely.

Nichole: Dark and Lovely, that was what I was going to say, yeah, yeah.

Aseloka: The purple box?

Nichole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, girl.

Aseloka: But my mom noticed, I think it was maybe the way I was wearing my hair, she noticed that all of this hair in the middle of my head had just broken off and it was so short and when she realized it she destroyed whatever hairstyle I had and just started going through it, running her fingers through and was devastated. She cried. I mean, she was so mad at me and I remember feeling like, “Oh my God, I've really done something terrible.”

Aseloka: I feel like most teenagers have this where they dye their hair some stupid color and it turns green or something, but for me it was this perm disaster or whatever damage I did to my hair. But I mean, you would have thought that I deliberately murdered a pet.

Nichole: Why? Why did she react that way?

Aseloka: I mean, I can only speculate. This wasn't something that we talked about in depth at the time. At the time I was just so sad and ashamed. Like, “Oh my God, I really messed up.” But I do know that she cared so much about my hair and she had put a lot of time and effort and money into me looking nice and for me to have done whatever I did to destroy it, she was just so sad. And mostly I just remember just feeling bad that I had made her cry. She cried.

Nichole: Had you ever seen her cry over something like that before?

Aseloka: No, never.

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: My mother's reaction to this debacle stayed with me. I realized how important hair was and I carried that up through adulthood right into my work life. I feel like job interviews for black women are always like, "Oh wait, do I be me or do I be who they want me to be?" And by then I had discovered this natural hairstyle where it's one big twist around my head. It looks like a braid.

Nichole: Love that look.

Aseloka: And it's super quick to do. It's really simple. I didn't have to do anything extra to my hair to get it to do that, so I remember feeling like, "Oh, I have a solution. I don't have to worry about what my hair is going to look like. I don't have to choose between straightening my hair or an Afro, I don't have to choose between them or me."

Aseloka: Now Azalia, I have a hunch that you would have chosen the straight hair option, but that's a whole lot. That's a lot of time, that's a lot of energy. That's a whole lot of effort into something that I am doing for someone else. After a while I just decided not to anymore.

Nichole: What was the first thing you let go from that time?

Aseloka: It was my hair so even though I had all these feelings about what my hair should look like, like I should be presentable and my hair is a really big part of that. I had already gotten over it being straight. I stopped perming my hair in college, but there were still hairstyles that were just a little bit too much for the workplace. You know, an Afro was a big deal or wearing my hair in a way that didn't seem tamed, even if it was curly, if it was too out and in your face, it was too much.

Aseloka: And I've always admired the hairstyles I see and just have wanted to be free enough to do them. And I remember in that job I was just like, "You know what, it is not worth all of this effort." And so I was just like, "I can't." It happened over time but I was just like, "I just, this isn't good for me. I'm just going to wear my hair out and not even in a big curly fro." I had just blown it out but didn't style it. I didn't flat iron it after I blew it out. It was just big. I don't like the, "Can I touch your hair?" But I don't mind most of the questions.

Aseloka: They were mostly compliments. Nobody pulled me aside like, "We're going to have to ask you to go home." Nobody did anything like that, so again, and I work in a university so I think that probably accounts for at least some of why there was just very little fuss about it overall.

Aseloka: In college and studying abroad and growing up again in very white spaces do you feel othered having to do something that your white friend doesn't do? And I guess that's something that was very young of me and at this point I'm like, "Girl, whatever. Who cares?" But yeah, in the past it was something that I definitely struggled with. I think I'm lucky to work in a place where it doesn't matter that my braids are down to my calves, like at all. It doesn't matter that sometimes I wrap my hair. It doesn't matter to be very much so like a black woman because I work in a place full of black children and also black women. I think if I were to work in a corporate office or something, I would probably struggle with straddling that line of being considered professional, but also being authentic to who I am.

Aseloka: But growing up just as a person and maturing more, I think I've started to care less and less what people think about me. And especially after living in a place where your blackness was questioned and minimized so much. I definitely am like, "No, I'm going to get braids down to my calves. I'm going to wrap my hair up in a scarf at work. I'm going to wear a shirt that's very pro black and I'm not going to be embarrassed about that. I need to be so black and so in your face that there's no question of what I am or who I am or what I'm about."

Aseloka: What's so often very difficult is this balancing act that we as black women and black people often have to do in the workplace or other places that may not be quite as welcoming to the way we tend to exist out in the world. Especially when it comes to things like hair and clothes and even the way that we talk. In those times where we want to be proud of who we are and how we are, sometimes we're forced to make a decision.

Aseloka: Do you watch Insecure?

Female: I do.

Aseloka: Okay, I'm not caught up so don't tell me anything new. So you know when Molly was working with that girl?

Nichole: Yeah,

Aseloka: Yeah. And she told her, she's like, "Hey listen, I just want to let you know that sometimes you come off in this way and you should tone it down because these people aren't really for it." And the girl was like, "No, no, no. They love it. I don't know what you're talking about. You're a hater, whatever bye." And Molly was right that she was being perceived in this way where

people thought she was uncouth and just uneducated and all of these things that legitimately weren't true. From what I remember, she was qualified for the position and all of these things. It was fun at first because, again, it's kind of like this minstrel thing where it's like... Not menstrual, minstrel.

Nichole: No, minstrel, yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Aseloka: This menstrual thing where it's like, "Oh, you know, she's so funny and blah blah blah, sister girl," and all this bullshit. You have no buy-in. You have no reason to appreciate the way that I'm speaking other than you find it amusing. So that's even problematic within itself. So then it's like you have to learn to speak in a way where people will take you seriously instead of being amused by you.

Aseloka: We sort of constrict ourselves because of the concerns that we have about how we're viewed outside of our culture by white people. I want young black girls to be carefree and to love who they are fully and wholly as they are. I really and truly do. I also understand the world that we live in. Not everybody works in an environment like mine where nobody's going to come out of pocket asking you something stupid about your hair. And that's a real thing, that's a real life consequence. And we all have to do what's best for us, but I feel like we are healthier, we're happier in environments where we can be our whole selves.

Nichole: Knowing though that there may not be as many environments where we can do that, how do you prepare someone?

Aseloka: That's a great question.

Nichole: In a healthy way, in the way that you're saying?

Aseloka: Yeah, I mean, I one, encourage women to seek out environments where this can be the case.

Nichole: No doubt.

Aseloka: To pay attention to those things and to make environments where you don't feel suppressed or oppressed, a priority. I also understand that, again, not everyone can afford that, but in spaces where we can, and if not at work, then who are you spending your time with? Who are you surrounding yourself with that can reinforce those values for you? What is being said in the places that you frequent, the organizations that you're associated with, about who you are and what is presentable?

Aseloka: And if those places are encouraging a view that encourages you to be you, then that's what I would encourage women to pursue, women of any age. I also find that the women that I know who are older than me, they often settle into this thought process over time. The older they get, they tell me that it's been easier for them to do what works best for them. And I think, where you can, if you can create space for yourself and hopefully that creates space for other people, that's great. If that's at all possible to do that.

Aseloka: If you can start your own thing or provide a space, even if it is just for you to allow yourself to be who you are in a certain setting. Maybe you can't do it at work, but maybe when you're at home, when you're with your friends, you are expressing outwardly, but always looking for the consistency. If you can be you in all places, I think that's better for-

Nichole: Everyone.

Aseloka: Yeah, it's better for all of us.

Aseloka: Azalia, I'm working really hard to be that level of free, especially when it comes to appearance. There is more to me than that. I'm not quite there yet, but it is something that I think is important enough to put some deliberate effort into on a regular basis. So that's what I'm trying to do. Baby steps each day.

Aseloka: When I first sat down to talk with Andrea, she mentioned this quote by Maya Angelou that I looked for but could not find, but in doing so, I came across this quote by Ama Yawson that I wanted to share with you and I think you'll appreciate it.

Aseloka: If you have the privilege of born a black woman it is my belief that it is a part of your divine mission to liberate yourself from all external and internalized oppression and thereby liberate the world.

Nichole: Oh,

Aseloka: Oh, my God. Is that not beautiful?

Nichole: I just feel like I should put on a beret, leather jacket-

Aseloka: You should just go out into the streets and-

Nichole: You're free now.

Aseloka: ... and liberate the people.

Nichole: We're all free now. You're welcome.

Aseloka: We're all free now, you're welcome.

Nichole: Signed, black women. Yours truly, black women.

Aseloka: I love it. I love it.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful was created and is hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was produced by me and edited by Nichole Hill. Music is from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalia is the

church mother who is preemptively handing you a lap cloth the second you get to your seat at church. We'll be back with a new episode on November the 12th. We want to know what you think of the show. Give us feedback. Tweet at us, leave us comments on Instagram. Go to our Facebook page. Send us an email. Send us voice messages. We want to hear your voice.

Aseloka: We would love to feature some of you in our bonus episodes after the season ends. You can always visit us at [coloredgirlbeautiful.com](http://coloredgirlbeautiful.com). Our website is a one stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media and staying in touch. If you like what you hear, please give us a five star rating on Apple Podcast and Podchaser, and get your friends to do it too. And more importantly, tell your friends about the show.

Aseloka: You guys have been so great so far getting the word out and we really appreciate that. Keep doing it. The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX and the Google Podcasts Creative Program. We'll see you in two weeks.

Aseloka: So my favorite question to ask Andrea was if she had any what I call black girl aspirations. We know what those are.

Andrea: Like edges?

Aseloka: Edges, yes.

Nichole: Comb through edges.

Aseloka: Baby hair.

Nichole: Baby hair. Laid, okay.

Aseloka: This is black girl blasphemy, but I haven't let go of the idea that I need to have my edges laid.

Nichole: Oh.

Aseloka: I know, I know you're judging me right now. I understand. I get it.

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: I know.

Nichole: Email Aseloka. I don't want to hear about it. Tweet her.

#### Transcript – S1E4 The Colored Girl Beautiful – How the Colored Girl Beautiful Finds Purpose

Nichole: Let's say you make it to Michelle Obama level, do you think that you could sit with that amount of power, and not feel like I have to do something great for my people.

Aseloka: Yeah, definitely. I would definitely feel like I need to do something great for my people. So here's the thing. It's not fully that I disagree. It's the language that makes me uncomfortable. I feel, even just me, as I am little old, normal Aseloka, I feel very compelled to help my people to do whatever I can to help move us forward. I feel especially compelled. And I could not see myself living any other way, but in service of figuring out what we can do for us. Just point blank, there's no other way I would want to live. There's no other place I would want to focus my efforts. But to be held responsible, that feels like something different to me. And again, when I hear Heather's tape, it sounds just so lovely and warm and she just makes me flip the whole thing upside down on my head.

Heather: Being a black chef in this country, I feel like I have this secret inheritance. I feel like I have this rich history, that everyone else doesn't have, and there's seldom opportunities for me to feel like my history isn't richer than someone else's. Food is one of the areas in which, at least for a long time, we were allowed to master without being messed with too much.

Aseloka: So Azalea, you probably figured this out already, but that was Heather.

Nichole: Who is Heather?

Aseloka: Heather is a dear friend of mine. First of all, she's an amazing chef. I talked with Heather about her feelings on what I would sum up in your writing as racial responsibility. In other words, our responsibility as black people to uplift our race.

Heather: I feel a certain reverence for the fact that I am doing the same work that the hands of mamas and grandmamas before me that are responsible for. Super random, but I learned this fact in school. Girls are born with all their eggs inside of them. Sometimes I sit, I don't sleep well, but sometimes I sit and I consider how that means myself, my sister, we were all inside of my mom when she was born. So that means when my grandma was pregnant with my mom, we were all in there. And so if you follow it back, I just feel like such a physical connection to the women in my family, and then they were the ones doing the cooking, you know what I mean?

Aseloka: The way she describes it as so much like a part of who she is, and it's so important to her. It feels magical. It's beautiful. I love listening to her talk about it.

Heather: And yeah, I just feel like I'm not being made to cook for someone else. It's something I chose for myself, something I'm good at, and that has value.

Aseloka: I don't even like to cook for real.

Nichole: But I listened to her talk.

Aseloka: But I'll listen to her talk about it all day.

Aseloka: Hey there, Azalea, it's Aseloka again, and this is the Colored Girl Beautiful. A heartfelt letter from one generation of black women in search of purpose to another. When I first read about this idea of racial responsibility in the Colored Girl Beautiful, it did give me some pause.

Nichole: Can you read me the quote from the book?

Aseloka: I can read you the quote from the book, as soon as I...

Nichole: Tell me a tale. Read me something.

Aseloka: I feel like there's a... When I first read this passage, it made me think a lot about how we as black women are often expected to carry the emotional weight, the financial weight, all these things, we're expected to hold this very specific place for the people in our lives. And Azalea, in your writing, it's not just the people around us, it's also the people who look like us. And while I do believe in being there for the people around me, this is often an imbalance for us as black women. This is often an area where we carry so much of the burden, that it really becomes too heavy. It becomes, I think, impractical.

Aseloka: Okay, so this is the quote from Madam Hackley. It says, "The colored woman beautiful believes that everyone who gets up must pull up, or else she will be kept down by the weight of the racial burden. Each one's welfare is closely bound with that of the masses. The race as a whole must progress and prosper, or else no unit may prosper. The colored

woman beautiful, gives the best in her for race advancement. She works, thinks, and reads to be ready for the need of tomorrow, and its problems.”

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: It's all very grand, and it's all very important. And I appreciate that. I really do.

Nichole: But...

Aseloka: But, I can't, it doesn't fully sit well with me, this idea that the colored woman should give the best in her for everyone else.

Nichole: Well, not everyone, just the black people. Just every black.

Aseloka: Not every, just the blacks. We're only talking about the blacks here.

Nichole: To be clear.

Aseloka: To be clear. But still, I think that's a lot of weight on her shoulders. That's a lot of yourself to give away. I think that's the bottom line for me, for me personally, it's a lot of me to give away. And I was initially really coming from that place, and I think that's more so got to do with my own personal history, and what I feel like I see in the black women around me. But it just didn't quite sit well with me. But then to hear Heather talk about it, it's like this wonderful thing that of course I want to do.

Heather: For a long time I worked as a private chef, and I would travel with people, and do special events and stuff like that. I could say, “You know what, Susie Q, I can't make it this time.” “Okay.” And because they had the resources, they could find someone else to do what I was doing. So that was kind of on my mind.

Nichole: Heather, it seems that she has some type of an epiphany of sorts. How does this happen?

Heather: I don't know who I was listening to speak, but they were talking about, probably on one of my late night YouTube rabbit hole missions. But they were speaking about how different cultures, if the community needs a doctor, well this little baby is going to be a doctor. If the community needs... The community kind of, we might say it's controlling, but that's how they insulate themselves, and protect themselves, and stay well as a community. I wouldn't say that I agree with that 100%, but it resonated enough where I felt a slight pang of, I didn't pursue anything that my people need. I could have, I should have pursued something of more value to my community. So that was something I sat with for a while.

Aseloka: Yeah. I don't think I've ever had that sort of a thought. I don't think any of it ever occurred to me before hearing Heather say those words. Pursuing something that might people need.

Heather: And then I took a trip, and I went to Brazil. I was in Bahia.

Aseloka: So Heather took this trip to Brazil, and it basically changed her life.

Heather: Brazil will do that.

Aseloka: It sounds wonderful.

Heather: Have you ever been to Brazil?

Aseloka: I've never been. I would love to go. I mean hearing this story from Heather makes me want to go.

Heather: Brazil was a defining moment in my life, I feel like. I feel like I am still unpacking and surprising myself with things that Brazil taught me. I didn't go thinking I had particularly any ancestral connection. I still don't know if I do, but I just felt so much energy, positive energy. I was in Bahia, and so partially while there, and since I've been back, I've done a lot of research, and a lot of people say they feel a lot of energy in Bahia

in particular. The first thing that surprised me and delighted me walking down the street in Brazil, it looks like you're walking down a street in East Baltimore. Brazilians, at least, not where I was. They don't look like Miss Brazil. They look more like Miss Nigeria, you know what I mean? It's black people, who look like me, who walk up to you assuming you speak Portuguese, and start talking. I was the darkest I've ever been in my life, being exposed to that South American sun. When I tell you, feeling myself, the selfie game was just popping. It was so serious.

Heather: It was just awesome. It was the first time ever in my life somebody called me African. Such a, it just felt, I don't even know the word is. I ordered food. I was sitting quietly and patiently waiting. The person, the food runner came out, and didn't know where to take it. And the waiter was across the courtyard and so he said, "The African lady at this table." I was like, "Yes."

Aseloka: That's me.

Heather: Yeah. It was me. He's talking about me. I'm the African woman at the table.

Nichole: That is a really nice thing, going to a place that has a lot of African people. Or black people, wherever they're from. And you're like, "Whoa, look at us." Look at us, everywhere, looking the same, but so different.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: Its nice.

Aseloka: Yeah. I felt that way when I came to Baltimore.

Nichole: Did you?

Aseloka: Yeah. Because I came from West Virginia. And before I was here, I lived in Ohio. I had not lived in a majority black city. So I got to Baltimore, and I was like, "What? Oh my God."

Nichole: This was your Brazil?

Aseloka: This was my Brazil. Whatever. I love Baltimore. So she had this experience where she just realized that the way that people exist in Brazil is just from a completely different foundation. Everyone sort of assume that we'll all share what we have. But she talks about how it's different when you go out to a restaurant, and you're served a drink, for example. It's expected that you share with everybody.

Heather: Everything is shared. So that they don't ask, if I were to sit down with you at a bar, and order a beer, they would come with two small glasses, and split it between us. Without asking. If 10 of us sat down, we'd each get a 10th of that beer in a small glass.

Aseloka: Or these women, they get up in the morning, and they make food, and they feed whoever's around. And that's just the culture there.

Heather: The older women the [inaudible 00:14:12], they would get up and make these big pots of [inaudible 00:14:15], which is this corn porridge, and just give it out. Children, school children, homeless people, apparently single black Baltimorean women traveling for the first time to South America. Everybody was welcome to have some porridge in the morning, and it was just free, they just were there to give it out just to feed you. And I just felt like, what am I doing? You know what I mean? And not even in like the judgy way, not being kind to myself, but the literal, what am I doing? Heather? What are you doing? What is the plan that we are working right now?

Heather: And so I just came home with renewed kind of vigor toward what was possible, and had kind of a revelation of sorts, that I no longer wanted to cook exclusively for people who could afford to pay me. I wanted to cook for people who needed me to cook for them. I want to teach people who have the desire to feed their family better, but just don't know how. I want to point the finger at crap food that's brought into our community, and make sure everybody knows. It's like we see you. Who are you feeding that to? So that's kind of where I'm at now.

Nichole: So what are Heather's thoughts on our racial responsibility?

Aseloka: So Heather feels very responsible for her race. She feels like she has a very specific part to play, and the way she talks about it is wonderful. It's beautiful. And again, it makes me feel differently about the way that I feel.

Nichole: Does it?

Aseloka: Yeah, because to hear, it just sounds very... I feel like everything that she describes is actually what I want. I believe deeply in community. I think that we are better individuals when we are in community with other people. When we have people to support us, when we are sharing with people, when we know how to get along with the people around us, when we are truly a part of one another's lives. I believe in that deeply, and that sounds a lot like what she experienced there. And I think that's a beautiful thing. I would love to see more of that. We live in a very individualistic society, and I just think we would all benefit from being in community with one another more. But she describes it as this really beautiful, wonderful thing that she is really invested in.

Aseloka: And that's how I think of it. But I think a lot of times, probably because of my experiences, it feels a lot more like a weight. It feels very heavy. It

feels like what I want and need are not being considered. So for me it's this really interesting sort of dichotomy, where both things exist very much for me in this way.

Aseloka: So what I found really encouraging is that Heather also had some doubts. She also felt very intimidated by this idea of racial responsibility. Granted, for different reasons than I did. But there was still some hesitation there.

Heather: My first phase of recognizing a responsibility to my people kind of terrified me. I know all of my flaws. I know all of my weaknesses. But when others outside of yourself can benefit from your success, and yet you see these things, or at least know these things that could stand in the way, that's heavy. It's one thing to say, "I was not able to do this good thing for these people, because these external things happened." It's something wholly different to feel like you were unable to accomplish something that someone or some people that you care about needed because you did something, or you were not enough, or you... you know what I mean?

Aseloka: You were the impediment.

Heather: Yeah. You were the impediment and so that's what terrified me, was that I would be the thing in the way.

Heather: And then Brazil helped me to see that it wasn't a burden that I was carrying. It was, yes, my duty, but also my privilege to be of service to my people.

Aseloka: And so she sees that she experiences it, and thinks it's wonderful, and wants to sort of bring that back with her to the states.

Heather: But just all that to say the whole trip, everything in Brazil, it helped me feel grounded, and feel less afraid of this sense of responsibility that I

have. You can be responsible, and have a serious obligation, and still find joy, and beauty, and be happy about it.

Aseloka: Azalea, I think that was a perspective that I was missing. A perspective that I didn't see before, or didn't acknowledge, for whatever reason, history, biases, past experiences, whatever. But I'm so glad that I had this conversation with Heather, so that it could give me a little more context into what you were writing about. It's heartening to know that I can find beauty, and privilege in something that I have to carry, something that I want to carry, or that I choose to carry. I definitely need those reminders, because that's something that's really difficult for me. But I think I needed that reality check. I have to remind myself of that more.

Heather: However successful I am, however much I'm able to get, when you just get 10 glasses and split it, you know what I mean? I may not be able to complete whatever task set before me 100% the way I would like to, but that does not mean that I can't do it well, and it does not mean that it will not be enough. It can still be enough.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl beautiful was created and is hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was produced and edited by Nicole Hill, and Aseloka Smith. Music is from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalea is the confetti animation on your smartwatch, celebrating each milestone you achieve towards your goal. We'll be back with a new episode on November 26th. Keep the feedback coming. We do not ever get tired of hearing from you. Mention us on Twitter, tag us in your IG posts, and like us on Facebook. Oh, and don't forget to leave a five star rating. You can do that at Podchaser for Android users, and Apple Podcast for iOS folks. Links to both in the show notes.

Aseloka: Our favorite way for you to show support is to share the show with friends. Tweet out a link to your favorite episode, or click the share icon in your podcast app, and send this episode to a friend that you think might like it. Any way you can get the word out helps. Remember, you can always visit us at [ColoredGirlBeautiful.com](http://ColoredGirlBeautiful.com). Our website is a one-stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media, and in a few weeks we'll have merch available, including t-shirts. Keep your eyes open for that. The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX, and the Google podcast creators program. We'll see you in two weeks.

Nichole: When I think about working in a kitchen, like how you're saying it's magical, she just wakes up. I just picture like falling in love, just chefs falling in up. I just feel like they make a lot of movies about that.

Aseloka: Yeah. Like it has to be this beautiful romantic thing.

Nichole: Romantic, yes.

Aseloka: Like you're just, I don't know, chopping carrots together.

Nichole: No big deal.

Aseloka: And then all of a sudden, you're like feeding them to one another, and it's just beautiful.

Nichole: You're feeding them. How sanitary.

Aseloka: No. That has to be the order. There's one moment. At one point, you're chopping the carrots, and then something just overtakes you. And then all of a sudden, you're feeding each other.

Nichole: See, I watch a lot of Hallmark. So I'm picturing this is my kitchen. I'm the boss in this kitchen. Oh no. We have to work together, because the client needs this thing that only the two of us can make. Oh, we're mad. We're mad, but we worked it out. You know what? You're not so bad

after all. Oh, let's go out, but oh, I got the job in New York. I got to go.  
Will we be together? I choose you. The end. Roll Credits.

Aseloka: Oh my God. That's like the whole plot of, what was that movie with Ali Wong that was on Netflix.

Nichole: Oh my God. You're right. That was exactly what I just described. Call me. No, it's not call Me Maybe.

Aseloka: Always Be My Baby.

Nichole: Always Be my Baby. That's what it is.

Aseloka: First of all, I am here for a cheesy, romantic comedy. That bits off the bills.

Nichole: Keep it going.

Aseloka: Keep it going.

Nichole: Another one, and another one.

Aseloka: Yes, absolutely. I'm here for it.

#### Transcript – S1E5 The Colored Girl Beautiful – The Colored Mother Beautiful

Aseloka: So, my friend texted me the other day, middle of the day. She's like, "Guess what?" I was like, "What?" then she just sent me this picture.

Nichole: I love that.

Aseloka: It's a little sonogram.

Nichole: Look at the little nugget in there.

Aseloka: It looks like he's reclining in her stomach.

Nichole: Just chill.

Aseloka: Yes.

Nichole: I'm the most comfortable ever. Like, I'm living my best life right now. I might as well-

Aseloka: Hanging out.

Nichole: How many weeks?

Aseloka: I didn't even ask. I immediately went into like-

Nichole: [crosstalk 00:00:32] an ultrasound?

Aseloka: Oh yeah, it should be ... Oh.

Nichole: First trimester.

Aseloka: Oh my God. You know how to read ultrasounds? What?

Nichole: I do, I'm a doctor actually. You ain't know?

Aseloka: I didn't even-

Nichole: I didn't tell you? It's right up in that corner right there.

Aseloka: Oh my gosh. Oh yeah. First trimester. Yeah. It's their first baby. They're doing it. It's crazy.

Nichole: So sweet, I feel like I [inaudible 00:01:01].

Aseloka: Hey, Azalea, it's still Aseloka. And this is The Colored Girl Beautiful. A heartfelt letter from one generation of black women considering motherhood to another.

Aseloka: I feel like I have legitimately seen baby stuff everywhere. Everywhere I don't know what it is. All my friends are practice.

Nichole: All of my friends are pregnant too.

Aseloka: All of my friends are pregnant. Also just seeing all of the little tiny babies and their little feet and hands is like, oh my God.

Nichole: Oh my God, they're so small.

Aseloka: They're so small.

Nichole: It doesn't even make any sense.

Aseloka: So, how is it even possible? They're so tiny, and cute and fat all at the same time?

Aseloka: So, there's definitely baby dust in the air and everyone I know is having children. And it's definitely made me think a lot about what I want my future to look like. So, as its customized these days, I sat down with my producer, Nichole to debrief.

Nichole: Here we go, this is the question. Does it make you want to have a baby?

Aseloka: It does make me want to have a baby.

Nichole: Does it? Really?

Aseloka: Yes.

Nichole: Why? Well, have you always wanted to be a mother or is it just happening now?

Aseloka: I have literally always wanted to be a mother. Since I was very small I've wanted four children. That won't be happening.

Nichole: Four?

Aseloka: Yes, I've wanted four children, two boys, two girls. I wanted boy, girl, boy, girl. Like, boy being the oldest. Because I wanted the older brother to take care of his younger siblings. I had very rigid views of what girls and boys do as a child.

Nichole: They've evolved since then I'm sure.

Aseloka: It's evolved since then. But yeah, I've always wanted to be a mom. Particularly for me because I had fibroid tumors, very large, like, intense fibroid tumors to the point where my doctors described my uterus as being the same size as a woman who was five months pregnant.

Nichole: What?

Aseloka: Yeah. Ridiculous. But, I mean, like very large. So, I had a surgery to have them removed last fall. I got a lot of warnings about, you know, “If you want to have kids, there's a really good chance that your fibroid tumors, because they were so extensive that they will return.”

Nichole: Wow.

Aseloka: And so, like, the sooner the better.

Nichole: So, there's like the, I mean it is an actual biological clock.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: But yours feels like it's ticking even faster after this diagnosis.

Aseloka: So, I have not reached what they call advanced maternal age, which is 35 or over. I'm not there yet, but I'm not too far away. On top of that, I know I have this thing apparently that happens inside of my uterus, or that has happened. I mean, it's not guaranteed that my tumors will return.

Aseloka: But they very well could. And if they do, that can make pregnancy very difficult or impeded entirely depending on where they are. So, for me it feels like this very prep pressing thing. I kind of feel like it's maybe it's something to consider sooner rather than later when it will for several reasons be much harder for me.

Nichole: Okay. So, you think about being a mom. You think you want to be a mom. What is the holdup?

Aseloka: Well, it's a big deal. It is something that I take seriously. So, it takes a lot, it takes a lot of energy. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of emotional fortitude. I think that those are all things that matter. I feel like those are all things that I'm able to do. Like, I think I could do it, but also like, can I do it?

Aseloka: Now, Azalia, I know that you were very confident about wanting to have children. And you even felt like it was actually a responsibility for black women. And you describe it as this beautiful, wonderful thing that we should all want to do. And while I do want to, I just, I have my reservations.

Nichole: What's the answer that you want to hear? What do you want someone to tell you about it?

Aseloka: Well, what I want is someone to like spell it out for me. Like, yep, I know that it's possible, but I want step by step instructions with indexes, and page references, and "Please see section A134-"

Nichole: Totally reasonable.

Aseloka: Yeah, that's not a lot to ask.

Nichole: And you deserve it. You're a queen.

Aseloka: That's my primary concern.

Nichole: Okay, so that's what we're looking for.

Aseloka: So, if someone could just lay it out for me step by step in all aspects of motherhood and raising a child, that would be great. I can move forward confidently. There we go. Boom. Perfect.

Nichole: I love that. That is a phenomenal [inaudible 00:07:02].

Aseloka: But that's the person that I am. I want to know all the things before I jump in. I've been looking for a some additional storage for my computer for a while, for probably, I'm going to say like the last three months.

Nichole: And what's your process for looking up these hard drives?

Aseloka: What's the best in terms of functionality? What is the most cost efficient? What feature do I need to pay attention to or what does it matter? My purposes, specifically ... I want to know performance

speeds, the data [crosstalk 00:07:42] I've got two terabytes of storage ...  
All of these things that probably any given moment.

Nichole: Okay. Got it. Amazing. I knew what all those words mean and I'm with you, me too. Okay. How has that been working for you in your life?

Aseloka: In my life in general it serves me well.

Nichole: How so?

Aseloka: I'm a great employee. I've been a phenomenal student. You know, in most areas that matter this has done nothing but make me better.

Aseloka: So, I talked with Nicole about how, for me, researching is a big part of the way I make decisions. But, making this particular decision is a little bit different.

Nichole: What is your process to making the decision to birth a human?

Aseloka: Yeah, so here's the thing, I do not have ... As you might be able to imagine, the same set of resources available. There are not a zillion YouTube reviews on how to grow a child or raise a child. I mean, there are a lot of mommy blogs. I've been on my fair share of YouTube rabbit holes when it comes to parenting stuff.

Aseloka: But there's no way for me to determine how to parent a child that I give birth to. Like personality differences alone, it's just like, I can't plan for that. I cannot solve for that ahead of time.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: Which is infuriating.

Nichole: Okay. So, you do your research thing, you're on YouTube, you're watching the mommy blogs, you're not getting what you need. So, what's the next ... What do you do?

Aseloka: So, the next thing is to go to someone who has experience with this. I have lots of friends who are mothers. I asked my friend Jasmine about what this looks like for her.

Aseloka: I think [inaudible 00:10:02] look at her.

Jasmin: So, you hear pitter patter, little feet?

Ava: My feet isn't little.

Nichole: So, you recorded this at her house, is that right?

Aseloka: Yes, we recorded at Jasmin's house.

Nichole: Okay. Like live on the scene-

Aseloka: Yes.

Nichole: From the home of a mother.

Aseloka: Man on the street.

Jasmin: Just watch Disney plus. Go ahead and watch something downstairs. Ma'am, downstairs. Thank you.

Aseloka: So, it was a little bit of an adventure.

Jasmin: She had to try it. Just one try.

Aseloka: I love it.

Aseloka: If there's one thing that I know for absolute certain about Jasmin is that she loves being a mother. So I figured Jasmine would be the perfect person to talk this through with me. And so of course I asked her about your writing.

Aseloka: I want to read you a quote-

Jasmin: Okay.

Aseloka: From the book *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. It says, "To assume the position of colored motherhood is the greatest privilege and responsibility that can come to any woman in this age." Is that something you agree with?

Jasmin: I agree with it for me. I do not agree that it's universal.

Aseloka: Okay. So, you feel a sense of responsibility and privilege?

Jasmin: I do. However, I know that it's kind of built into my chemical DNA. I don't think that everybody's chemical DNA is built like mine. Sometimes motherhood is not a privilege. It's a burden. I can see how it can be a burden if your mind frame isn't where my mind frame, so to speak. I don't want to say it's right or wrong. But if your mind ain't right, privilege is the furthest thing that motherhood could feel like.

Jasmin: I consider it a privilege to watch motherhood generationally. So, my grandmother lives two and a half miles from me. My mama lives a mile from me, my daughter lives in the other room and I got a baby in my stomach.

Jasmin: I feel privileged to be able to like see versions of myself or be connected to people who've had different life experiences. Because that's her mother, and she's my mother and I'm their mother. It's a privilege to be able to converse with them, and talk to them, and see their perspective and see how your perspective differs. See how it evolved. That's a privilege if you are aware of it.

Aseloka: Now this is definitely a perspective that I hadn't considered and it is lovely, you know, the way that Jasmine describes it, especially living in such close proximity to her mother and her grandmother. And to have her children with her for them all to be daughters. That's a really beautiful thing. I think I'm just a little bit in awe of what that must be like.

Nichole: This is a question my dad always has for people. And he always asked them, "What do you want to teach your kid?" And he said, "That

stumps them every time.” Do you know what you want to teach your kid already?

Aseloka: Oh my God, how much time do we have?

Nichole: Even beyond the like cutesy things or even just at the basic human survival thing.

Aseloka: I mean, like none of these things are cutesy for me. I can't even think of like the cutesy stuff like, “It'll be precious to see a little baby.” I can think of those thing but when I think of what I want to teach a child, I feel like it's all of the big things that I've learned in life that I wish I had known much earlier than when these thoughts came to me, that I wish someone had shared with me. Or at the very least instilled in me from a young age.

Nichole: What's one of the top ones?

Aseloka: One of the top ones is to create space for people.

Nichole: What does that mean?

Aseloka: So, this is something that's really important to me in all of my relationships. Whether it's a romantic partner, or a friend or someone I consider family, I want to allow enough space for that person to be fully who they are, even when that's different from who I am.

Aseloka: That's not to say that I need to be different, that's not something that I want to do. But I want the people in my life to feel like that they are fully heard and seen. I think that's an important part of growth for people. I think that we are able to grow, we're able to be better. We're able to see past ourselves when we have space to do that.

Nichole: You know, I think Jasmin has done a little bit of that with Ava.

Aseloka: She definitely has. I do want to say that it's not just important for me to create space for other people, but to create space for myself as well. And

that's something I think Jasmin does so very well with her daughter. I know Jasmin personally and I am around her and her daughter. I see how they interact. Her little girl will be eight soon.

Aseloka: I can just see how she places value on her own opinion. Even if it's about LOL dolls and Play-Doh, she understands that the things that are important to her, they matter. Even if only to her, that matters.

Aseloka: One of the things I admire about the way Jasmin parents her daughter is the importance that Jasmin places on her daughter's own sense of who she is.

Jasmin: I want her to learn how to move throughout this life as herself. I've got to learn how to stay out the way. Because as parents you'll be like, "No, do this. No, go here. No, don't go there." But I also allow her to have a voice.

Aseloka: Jasmin has been very diligent about what she wants to teach her daughter. I think that's so important.

Jasmin: A good example is that she hates when I say stubborn. Ooh, child. If I say, "Look, come on, let's get it going. Brush your teeth. Let's get out of here." And she's, like, moving like molasses. Like, "Come on girl, we've got to go." And I'm like, "You're being stubborn."

Jasmin: "Don't call me stubborn." And then I had to think about it, like I'm the first person she's going to have to bounce stuff off of. If she can tell me no, she should be able to tell anybody in the street no. Because I feed and clothe her. And that's what I want. So I think those are my responsibilities to ... But it's so unconscious. Unless you make it conscious, unless you're like, "All right, so what word would you like me to use?"

Jasmin: And this is 7:40. We've got to go out the damn house. But I still have to be conscious in that moment. It'd be like, "What word do you want me to use?" And she'll say something like, "You could just tell me, 'We have to leave, Ava, and we have 10 minutes.'" And I'm like, "God damn it. She's right."

Aseloka: I love that that's something that is important to you. And you know, knowing Ava, I know that she is exactly that person. I think it's such an important thing that we as people maybe don't think enough about to give your child a choice. Or some such a sense of agency, this feeling that she can express what she's feeling, say those things out loud, articulate them. And I just think that's so important.

Aseloka: That's a wonderful skill that not enough of us have. Even as adults, I don't think we have enough of that. It's a beautiful thing that you're teaching that to her at such a young age.

Nichole: You know, you have to give them space to figure out who they are, even if it's not, you know who you want them to be or even if it makes you have to slow down in your day.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: I feel like that's really powerful.

Aseloka: Yeah. I think sort of the message I often got growing up was, "You can be what I allow you to be." You know? And that's not to say that my parents didn't care deeply for me. I know that they did, but their I think primary goal was compliance.

Nichole: Yeah. Yes, black parents.

Aseloka: Yes, black parents. And they did a good job with that. Because I most certainly did comply.

Nichole: And put a smile on my face when I did it.

Aseloka: And I put a smile on my ... “Girl, fix your face.”

Nichole: “Miss.”

Aseloka: I had a really lovely conversation with Jasmine, but I still didn't quite get the answers I was looking for. And that's not because Jasmine didn't have any words of advice. It's just because there are no answers.

Nichole: Did you get enough information from your conversation with Jasmine to make a decision?

Aseloka: No, I didn't. I think what I learned, bottom line, is that I'm not going to get this answer. I cannot get this ahead of time. Like, it's very hard for me to wrap my head around, like I'm just going to have to do it and you know, figure it out as I go. Which is so scary. Because that's not something I'm used to. That's not how I live my life. That's not how I make any decision is to just, you know, “All right, we're going to jump in and see what happens over the next 18 years.”

Nichole: Or the rest of your life, really.

Aseloka: Yeah. I mean yeah, definitely.

Aseloka: Now, despite all of my fretting, Jasmine gave some really encouraging words that I want to make absolute certain that I share, but I am still trying to let them sink in.

Jasmin: If you hear this and you have doubt in yourself, but you have, like, the smallest bit of faith in what you can do in your motherhood, or if you should be a mother, or you know, whatever. Lean on that. Because it can grow and sprout into something that you can have never ever imagined if you wouldn't have let that faith blossom into a reality. Oftentimes we're so set back on what reality is putting in front of us.

Jasmin: “Oh, I don't have enough money. Oh, this person left me behind. Oh, I'm going to be by myself.” But if you allow those things to be just what

they are, and still choose motherhood, and still choose to be the best version of yourself, I believe with all of me that you could produce and will produce a very loving, kind human being that is walking this earth. And don't let nobody tell you differently.

Aseloka: That's it.

Aseloka: Azalia, I'm really grateful that I have people in my life that I can ask these questions. Even when those questions lead to more questions. And after having this conversation, I'm realizing that a lot of my concern is about who takes care of you when you're taking care of someone else?

Aseloka: We'll talk more about that in the next episode. Thank you as always for listening, Azalia and for giving me something to think about.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful was created and is hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was produced and edited by Nichole Hill and Aseloka Smith. Music is from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalia is that one family member that has all the old school remedies for any ailment you can think of. We'll be back with new episodes on December 10th.

Aseloka: Season one of The Colored Girl Beautiful is almost over. There's only two more episodes for the regular season. But don't worry, we'll be in your feed on occasion with bonus content as often as we're able. Bonus content will include cut conversations that we weren't able to fit into the show, expert interviews, possibly a couple of field trips and hopefully your voice. Yes, you.

Aseloka: Send us your reactions to the show. We want to know what you think and we're always looking for feedback. So, you can email us a voice message, DM us on Twitter or IG, just send over your thoughts,

feelings, questions, about any episode from the season. We can't wait to hear from you.

Aseloka: For everything you've ever wanted to know about the podcast, visit us at [coloredgirlbeautiful.com](http://coloredgirlbeautiful.com). Our website is a one stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media and staying in touch.

Aseloka: If you like what you hear, share this episode in your podcast app with two friends. That's by far our favorite way for you to show your support. If you have a moment, give the show a five star rating on Apple Podcasts and Pod Chaser. Links to both are in the show notes.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX and the Google Podcast Creators program. Thank you so much for listening. We'll see you in two weeks.

Aseloka: I feel like it is a really unique way that I don't hear a lot of parents talk about, I don't know that a lot of parents prioritize-

Nichole: What was that?

Aseloka: No one did anything.

Nichole: It just did that-

Aseloka: What just happened?

Nichole: Itself. Something released in this.

Aseloka: Yeah. I'm so glad that I just bought these new, they know ... It sensed that something newer and better was coming, he's just like, "You know what?"

Nichole: This is The Little Toaster Oven That Could, you remember the cartoon?

Aseloka: Yes, the toaster. What was his name? I don't know, but he went all across the world. He took a road trip.

Nichole: With a vacuum cleaner.

Aseloka: With a vacuum cleaner.

Nichole: Oh my God, I loved it so much, I was like, “We cannot-”

Aseloka: I love that movie.

Nichole: “Just throw appliances away.”

Aseloka: It's not fair.

Nichole: It's not right.

Aseloka: It's not right.

Nichole: What about their feelings? What about everything that they ever wanted? After I watched Toy Story-

Aseloka: The lamp.

Nichole: I was so good to my toys.

Aseloka: Oh, that's right, the lamp. Girl.

Nichole: That's what's happening. Sorry. We didn't learn the lesson, now you're getting thrown out.

Aseloka: This is it.

## Transcript – S1E6 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Loss in the Life of the Colored Girl Beautiful

Aseloka: So this week, we're doing something different. We're going to talk about something you didn't write about. Loss. Hey Azalea, Aseloka here. And this is The Colored Girl Beautiful, a heartfelt letter from one generation of black women learning to live without a loved one to another.

Aseloka: So last week we talked to Jasmin, a dear friend of mine who shared some of her experience with us of being a mother. And we had a lovely

conversation, but there was a part of that conversation that we left out. I want this to be an honest and authentic space, so I wanted to come back and share with you that piece of the conversation that we didn't include. Because in talking with Jasmin about her experience of being a mother, and me potentially wanting to become a mother, it of course brought to mind for me the fact that my mother is not around anymore. And especially since we talked about creating space in the last episode, I wanted to create some space for that conversation in the show. And I wanted to share with you what that looked like for me in the moment when it happened. And so that's what I'm going to play for you. I'm going to play a really emotional moment that I had with Jasmin, listening to her talk about being there for her daughter.

Jasmin: You know, regardless of when Ava decides to have children, I'ma be there for her. I'ma be happy for her. I'm going to be supportive to her. I'm going to rub her back when sometimes it ain't easy, and be supportive in a real tangible way.

Aseloka: Yeah. She's very fortunate.

Jasmin: What does motherhood mean for you?

Aseloka: That's a great question. I think it's this beautiful connection. I had an amazing mother. She was not perfect. But I feel like she taught me so much about how to love, that I find so incredibly valuable now. And it's made me think a lot about wanting to be a mother myself, which I do. I would love to have that, to provide that sort of an experience for my own child.

Aseloka: In that moment, it just sort of hit me that if I did decide to do this wonderful, beautiful thing, I would have to do it without my mother. My producer, Nichole and I talked through some of my reaction.

Nichole: So you had quite a reaction to that discussion. Was that unexpected? I mean, it sounds unexpected.

Aseloka: It was entirely unexpected. I had not expected any part of this interview to be about me or how I felt about anything. So the reaction that I had was very visceral. It was very abrupt. It just sort of hit me out of nowhere. And I had no choice but to stop and acknowledge what I was feeling. What I was feeling about what Jasmin was saying, what I felt about what I wanted, that I knew wasn't possible, what I was sort of yearning for. And realizing that I would miss out on in some way, just because my mom's not around anymore.

Aseloka: You know, I think for me what's hard is like I listen to you talking about... being there to rub Ava's back when she's pregnant. And that's something I can't have. Because I know my mom would have done it for me. I know that she loved me so much. And it's just really painful to live with that...

Jasmin: I know.

Aseloka: I just miss her so much.

Jasmin: You know what I be thinking about, like when you talk to me about your mother, is that oftentimes we mourn, like when somebody die, we mourn their past, but nobody don't ever talk about how you can mourn the future, or what you know what would have been. Nobody ever really converses about that. You know she would have been there. With bells and whistles on, right?

Aseloka: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jasmin: And giving all her advice.

Aseloka: Yup.

Jasmin: That's unsolicited.

Aseloka: [inaudible 00:06:48]. I think sometimes I forget about that part. I forget that there are things that I will encounter in life that will remind me of what could have been, that'll cause me to grieve or mourn what I can't have. And I think that's why it's so surprising when it happens. Grief is this thing that hits you. It's not linear. It's not neat. It's not tidy. It's not this thing that only happens to you immediately after you've experienced a loss. Grief doesn't stay put. Those feelings will come and wash over you, and there just won't be anything you can do about it. And I had a moment like that during my interview with Jasmin.

Aseloka: I want to stop and acknowledge this moment, because it happened. And I don't want to gloss over the very real feelings and emotions that happen to a lot of us. And if I know us as black women, stopping to acknowledge a pain that we feel is not exactly a strong suit of ours, and so I'm sharing this with you now, in hopes that when your moment of loss comes, when you lose something, or someone, that means so much to you, and months, years after it happens, you feel that pain all over again. You'll know to stop. You'll know that it's okay to stop and acknowledge it. Don't bottle it up. Don't let it eat away at you. Just let it happen. Let it out.

Nichole: At the start of the interview, you talked about some of your hesitations being around not being able to get enough information, or have balance, but does knowing that you're going to have to do this without your mom impact your decision?

Aseloka: Significantly. And I'm still working through how much, but it definitely makes me hesitate more than would've probably been the case otherwise.

Nichole: But you do have support. Either way, you would not be alone.

Aseloka: Yes, I do have support. I would not be alone. But there is also something unique about having your mom around.

Nichole: Yeah. No doubt. Can you read me the text your friend sent you, after she listened to the tape about... When we were talking to Jasmin, when you were crying.

Aseloka: So after I did this interview with Jasmin, I was just really... First of all, I've come to a place where I'm much more open to sharing how I'm feeling in the moment with my friends, which has not always been a thing that I do. But I was just really struck at even my reaction to my conversation with Jasmin, because I didn't expect the interview to go that way, at all. And I was just really surprised at myself. And so I sent a couple of my friends a clip of that interview.

Aseloka: And my friend responded back, and... I can't even see it.

Nichole: It's beautiful. Yeah.

Aseloka: Oh goodness. If I can just... wipe the tears away long enough to be able to read. She said, "I will rub your back and hold your hand when your bundle is born. Scout's honor." It's just so sweet. And I am very fortunate to have people like that in my life. Amanda doesn't even, we don't live in the same state.

Nichole: But she'll be here.

Aseloka: But she will.

Nichole: Yeah.

Aseloka: And she won't be the only one.

Nichole: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's beautiful. We can end it there. That's beautiful.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful was created and is hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was produced by Aseloka Smith, with editing help

from Nichole Hill. Music is from Blue Dot Sessions. Azalea is the family friend who holds and comforts you when you cry, but doesn't pressure you to tell her what's wrong. we're taking a short break for the holidays, and we'll release a brand new episode on January the seventh. In the meantime, we'll put out a bonus episode on December 24th. We're nearing the end of season one for The Colored Girl Beautiful. But don't worry, we'll be in your feed on occasion with bonus content as often as we're able. And we want you to be a part of some of our bonus content. We'd love to hear your thoughts and reactions to the show, so email us a voice message, Tweet at us, or DM us on IG or Twitter with your thoughts, feelings, and questions about the show. We'll be responding to some of them in our bonus episodes.

Aseloka: For everything you ever wanted to know about the show, and the original book that inspired the show, you can visit [ColoredGirlBeautiful.com](http://ColoredGirlBeautiful.com). Our website is a one-stop shop for subscribing to our newsletter, following us on social media, and staying in touch. If you've been waiting for CGB merch, it is finally here. Check out our website, or the link in the description to get your very own Colored Girl Beautiful tee shirts. And if you have a moment, leave us a five star rating on Apple Podcast, and Podchaser. Links in the show notes. The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX, and the Google Podcast creators program. Thank you so much for listening. We'll see you in two weeks.

Aseloka: I keep hearing that when I bring my phone close.

Jasmin: That's because you got that whack phone.

Aseloka: Listen, don't be hating on my phone, okay? My phone serves me well.

## Transcript – S1E7 The Colored Girl Beautiful – Google Podcasts creators program Showcase

The following is a transcript of a live presentation I did at City Space in Boston on June 19, 2019. In this presentation I read the following copy from on stage and there was an accompanying slideshow for visuals. The audio from this presentation was posted as a podcast episode in late December of 2019. Sections in all caps are stage and slide cues. Video for this presentation can be found on the Colored Girl Beautiful YouTube channel and at <https://www.coloredgirlbeautiful.com/showcase>.

HOST INTRO: ASELOKA SMITH IS A DATA NERD AND ELEPHANT ENTHUSIAST WITH A LOVE FOR STORIES OF ALL TYPES. HER PODCAST, THE COLORED GIRL BEAUTIFUL EXPLORES BLACK WOMANHOOD IN THE PAST AND PRESENT USING EMMA AZALIA HACKLEY’S 1916 BOOK, THE COLORED GIRL BEAUTIFUL AS A GUIDE. TONIGHT SHE SHARES A BIT OF HER STORY WITH YOU ABOUT WHAT THIS PROJECT MEANS TO HER AND WHY SHE’S DOING IT. PLEASE WELCOME ASELOKA SMITH TO THE STAGE!

ACTION: ASELOKA WALKS OUT ONTO STAGE AND OVER TO MUSIC STAND

CUE - LIGHTING BLUE

CLICK - QUOTE: “THE COLORED CHILD SHOULD BE TAUGHT NEGRO HISTORY THAT SHE MAY BE PROUD OF HER DARK SKIN.” QUOTE IS ALSO VISIBLE ON THE SCREEN.

“The colored child should be taught negro history that she may be proud of her dark skin”

This is a quote from the book *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. It was written over a hundred years ago.

When I first read those words in graduate school, they felt new. They felt like confirmation of something I wanted to believe was true. Something I felt within myself but, up until then, I wasn't sure existed out in the real world.

I did not grow up in a home where there was much discussion of race. For the most part it just didn't come up. We did not discuss black pride or black history or very much about being black at all.

But what we did often discuss was skin color. This was not about being black—which of course came with its own set of anxieties—but this was about being dark-skinned. Does that sound familiar to anyone? If, by chance, you are not a black person, you may not be quite as familiar with the nuances of color among black people. I'd venture to say that among most black families skin color is a regular topic of discussion. And our family was no different. Your particular shade of brown, categorized generally as light-skinned or dark-skinned, is always noted for casual commentary.

CLICK - PHOTO: ASELOKA AS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGED KID

This is me as a kid. And as you can see I've pretty much always been about this shade of brown. I would say very firmly in the dark-skinned category. While my mother told me regularly that I was pretty, she also cautioned me heavily against staying out in the sun for too long.

CLICK - PHOTO: ASELOKA AT THE BEACH AS A KID

So this is me after my first and only trip to the beach as a kid where I got my first and only sunburn. Side note: that is not just wet hair it is jheri curled hair. Thank you early 90's. Normally on occasions like this where I would be out in the sun all day long, my mother made sure that I was slathering on sunscreen because she thought it would prevent tanning. But I wasn't with my family on this particular trip and either skipped the sunscreen (I hated it because it always made me look ashy) or stayed in the sun too long and exceeded its usefulness. Either way I managed to snag a nice little tan in this pic. But it was made quite clear to me that I should be putting considerable effort into not getting darker. Darker was bad.

Eventually I started to carry that around with me; the idea that my dark brown skin was something I should be ashamed of. Throughout middle school and up through high school you couldn't tell me I wasn't the blackest thing walking and in my mind there wasn't anything worse I could be.

I hid my tan lines when I got them. I complained about straying at any point from my "original" skin color. I was constantly comparing myself to my friends who were lighter than me and assumed I wasn't attractive to guys because I was dark-skinned. I was ashamed to just be myself.

CLICK - PHOTO: BLANK SLIDE

By the time I hit college it had just all become so exhausting and miserable. I decided that I was tired of being ashamed and started actively working to appreciate all aspects of myself but particularly, my skin color. I wish I could say it happened like it does in the movies where in one scene there's a girl who's all sad and doesn't believe in herself and then something profound happens to her and all of a sudden she's gets

a whole new outlook on life. Then in the next scene she's basically turned into Beyonce marching down the Homecoming runway dressed as a queen.

CLICK - PHOTO: BEYONCE DRESSED AS ROYALTY FROM HOMECOMING

I wish it happened like that!

But for me, it happened slowly.

CLICK - PHOTO: BLANK SLIDE

Slowly over several years more or less over the course of my college career and a little after, I started letting go of my negative views about my skin color. I sought out women who looked like me, or who were darker than me, that I genuinely felt were beautiful. I embraced the BlackGirlMagic trends that were just becoming prominent and celebrated my melanin with the rest of Black America. And I reminded myself to be grateful for the eight incredible years that my First Lady was the gorgeous...

CLICK - PHOTO: MICHELLE LA VAUGHN OBAMA PHOTO

Michelle LaVaughn Obama!

All of this together put me on a path to appreciating my own brown skin.

CLICK - PHOTO: BLANK PURPLE SLIDE

Fast forward to grad school and I'm in design class with a friend who had just presented a project about the pressures of women to be and present a certain way. When I ask her about her work after class she tells me she used a book called *The Colored Girl Beautiful* as reference. This was around 2016 and at the time I had never heard of it, so I went home, I looked it up and in those first few pages I came across that quote.

CLICK - SLIDE - QUOTE: “THE COLORED CHILD SHOULD BE TAUGHT NEGRO HISTORY THAT SHE MAY BE PROUD OF HER DARK SKIN.”

Now, this book was written by a woman named Madame Emma Azalia Hackley in 1916 and was a collection of speeches she gave, primarily to young Black women in the Jim Crow South at what would now be considered Historically Black Colleges and Universities. She knew that these young women would need a word of encouragement given the circumstances they had to endure being black in the early 1900’s. They needed to be told that they were beautiful and brilliant and the pride of the Black race. She wanted to give them a hope-filled message to repeat to themselves when the world told them they were less than, and ugly and too dark.

Now, imagine my surprise. I’ve been on this life-long journey of self-acceptance, and have made it through the ups and downs and agony of growth and finally come out on the other side, loving myself more and being proud of my dark skin and I happen to come across these beautiful words. Words written so lovingly on a page over 100 years ago that could’ve made my journey so much easier. Words I wished I’d had when I was 12 or 16 or 19. Words I wanted, needed to believe in.

At this point I wanted to know everything about this book. I tore through the pages looking for more of this sort of encouragement. And I found it.

CLICK - ONE SLIDE WITH THREE QUOTES:

“BE UNAFRAID”

“A WOMAN... SHOULD HAVE FAITH IN HERSELF”

“A WOMAN’S LIFE IS ABOUT WHAT SHE MAKES IT”

Throughout the book I found messages telling Black women to be unafraid and to have faith in ourselves and encourages us to take control over our own lives. These

would have been beautiful encouragements in 1916 but they also resonate with me now. Can you imagine the impact of hearing those words regularly growing up? As I read, I thought “This is it! This is the book that every little Black girl should read as a child, should keep close to her heart her entire life!”? Someone had already discovered our Blackgirlmagic and the beauty in our melanin and had written it down for young women like me to read and be encouraged by. And had done so over a century ago. Why was I just finding out about this now and by chance?

CLICK - BLANK SLIDE

So I read on and I expected 200 pages of affirmations and I did find plenty that were significant and meaningful to me, but that wasn't all that I found.

I started reading the book more closely and among all of the many encouragements for young black women, I also found phrases that didn't sit well with me :

CLICK - PHOTO: “WE MUST STIFLE THE DESIRE TO BE CONSPICUOUS UNLESS IT IS TO BE CONSPICUOUS BY QUIETNESS.”

I found suggestions that we try not to be noticed, unless others notice how quiet we are and I thought, “What is the hell is that all about? Why is my quietness the only thing allow to take up space in a room?”

As much as I loved Madame Hackley's encouragement for Black women throughout the book, I struggled with the limitations she placed on us. She said that we should both love ourselves and make ourselves small and be proud of our limitless potential but not be too ambitious And while I hadn't heard of the book before, I knew these standards very well. I was reminded of my own struggle with self-acceptance, having been told that I was pretty but also that I was too dark to ever be beautiful. Why we were doing this to each other even back then?! How is it still happening to me now?

Why do we give praise laced with criticism and encourage one another to struggle to reach impossible standards? And while I understand Madame Hackley and the pressures of her time, I want to know how we break free of this cycle.

CLICK - PHOTO: PAGES OF THE COLORED GIRL BEAUTIFUL WITH MY NOTES  
WRITTEN IN THE MARGINS.

I found myself scribbling questions like that frantically in red ink in the margins of my paper copy of the book, asking them to no one in particular. I wanted and needed a way to process them and then I found myself wondering if other Black women had these questions, and so I decided to talk to a few.

CLICK: VOX POP OF CLIPS CAPTURED THROUGHOUT THE SEASON

Those questions led me to the idea for this podcast, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. In each episode I'll talk to a Black woman about one of the topics from the book. I want to know how other Black women are managing the competing messages that have been passed down to us about love and ambition, our racial responsibilities, family obligations and friendships and all the other things that Madame Hackley gave advice about in her book. I want to hear and share stories of Black women being vulnerable and honest about their struggles and successes in navigating Black womanhood today by sharing their personal stories told in their own voices.

CLICK - PHOTO: IMAGE OF THE QUOTE, "I SEND THESE THOUGHTS TO THE DAUGHTERS OF OTHER COLORED WOMEN, HOPING THAT AMONG THEM THERE IS SOME NEW THOUGHT WORTHY OF A RACIAL 'AMEN.'" (Click to second slide "...hoping that among them" as Aseloka reads)

At the end of the foreword of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, Madame Hackley says: "...I send these thoughts to the daughters of other colored women, hoping that among them there is some new thought worthy of a racial 'Amen.'"

This is my way of doing just that: adding my own "new thoughts," as Madame Hackley puts it. I don't know what I'll find but I hope you'll listen along and we'll figure it out together.

CLICK - THANK YOU SLIDE

Thank you!

### Transcript – S1E8 *The Colored Girl Beautiful* – *The Colored Girl Beautiful* Learns to Love Herself

Aseloka: So this week, Azalia, I want to talk to you about my conversation with Tina.

Tina: It's funny, I'm really very introverted and very shy. Although it does not come across that way to people, but essentially I'm very shy and quiet, and loving and giving.

Aseloka: Now, I don't know Tina to be shy, but I do know her to be loving and giving. I also know Tina to be someone who has a very solid sense of self. So, per the usual, I wanted to talk that through with my producer Nichole, starting of course from the beginning.

Aseloka: Hey, there. Aseloka here, and this is The Colored Girl Beautiful, a heartfelt letter from one generation of black women, learning to stand firm in who she is, to another.

Nichole: You two met kind of quickly, and then you clicked right away.

Aseloka: Yeah. So, when I met Tina, we were both at a women's conference at the university where I work. It was a conference specifically for black women's and black girls' health and wellness, and we were on the same panel.

Aseloka: Now, first of all, I didn't have any business being on this panel. There was a black woman on campus who, I feel like, wanted to give me a chance and believed in me, and I'm so grateful. But, compared to the other people on this panel, I should not have been there.

Aseloka: But Tina was one of those people, and she had this mindfulness presentation that was really wonderful. We start chatting a little bit, and I told her that I was nervous and I had never done a presentation like this before.

Aseloka: But she helped me just calm down and she was like, "Oh no, you're going to be fine. Yeah, you're great." It was just lovely to have someone there on my side, when I was just freaking out about this new thing that I was doing.

Aseloka: I found her to be just a pleasant, wonderful person. So, I reached out to her, to see if I could talk with her more.

Nichole: Amazing.

Tina: Besides being a new author, a writer, a photographer, an artist, I'm an integrative healthcare professional. So, I teach mindfulness. I teach Reiki. Using my spiritual, mindful, meditative prayer time is what helps me stay in focus. I don't miss my morning session. It could be five

minutes, it could be 30 minutes, it could be an hour, depending upon how much time I have and what I need that day, but I don't miss that time with myself.

Aseloka: Since meeting her that day at the conference, Tina has continued to be a wonderful encouragement, and also a lovely example of someone who was just comfortable in her own skin. She brings her whole authentic self, whatever that happens to look like that day.

Tina: I've been a person, my entire life, mostly I dress for me. I dress for my girlfriends more than I dress for the men in my life. When I meet my girlfriends, I'm always good.

Tina: I think that sometimes we get caught up in ... we're trying to impress someone we're dating, whether that's a man or a woman, but I date men. I have always ... I've dressed. But when I'm getting in touch with my girlfriends, I'm always looking good.

Tina: But I like to look good, I'm not going to lie. I am the jewelry queen. Everything that I wear orbits around what jewelry I have. Most people get dressed with the outfit and put their jewelry on. Jewelry's first for me.

Tina: But I also want to say, aside from the exterior, there's an interior part that I had to find in that spiritual part of myself, that expresses itself in how I interact with other people, wanting to be around other people, to help other people.

Tina: I think the other thing would be the heart that I was given, that it's just really open and willing and hears. And I think that we have to look at the beauty, not just the exterior, but the interior. But the exterior, that's what people see.

Aseloka: Tina is 62, now. She just seems to have grown into herself, and I am so jealous. I feel like there are some things that I'm really good at. I'm getting close to being comfortable, comfortable. But she is comfortable in a way that, I don't know, maybe only comes with time or something. I appreciated this conversation. I call her every now and again, and we just chat on the phone for a couple of hours about everything and nothing. A lot of times, it's about boys. I so appreciate her perspective. It's been really helpful for me, just knowing her these last couple years.

Aseloka: I think that one of the things I appreciate about Tina is, that she doesn't let other people's perceptions of her change the way that she perceives herself. She strives towards excellence, and doesn't apologize for it. And Azalia, you had some encouraging words for us, about having that kind of a drive and ambition?

Nichole: Azalia quotes somebody else, this week. This is not her.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: Okay.

Aseloka: This is probably one of my favorite chapters, because it's so encouraging and it's so ... You can see in the texts here, that she really believes in black women and wants the best for us and wants us to reach our potential. It's really lovely. There's this one particular quote about work.

Aseloka: Azalia has this quote from a man named John Ruskin, who in all honesty, I've not been able to find a lot of mention about. But she feels like his concept of work is something that should be, and what she refers to as a universal creed.

Aseloka: But it says, "The man or woman who does work worth doing, is the man or woman who lives and breathes his work, with whom in is ever

present in his or her soul; whose ambition is to do it well and feels rewarded by the thought of having done it well.”

Nichole: Do you identify with the kind of drive and the urgency that's described in that quote?

Aseloka: Yeah. Because I think there's something really wonderful about doing something that drives you, doing something that is important to you to. For me, for example, like this podcast, I want to do this. This means a lot to me, and I put a lot of myself into it. I think that's a lot of what makes it meaningful. But this drive that she talks about here, the ambition that's mentioned in this quote ... But I just think in practice, what I have found, what I have seen, is that it backfires. A black woman who is that ambitious, is just perceived as a lot.

Nichole: In your conversations with Tina, did you all touch on that at all? Or did she have any similar experiences of this drive being perceived negatively by others?

Aseloka: Yeah, so for her it was at work.

Tina: My corporate jobs, with one exception, I've always been a manager, a supervisor or a director. So, I've always had a staff. The word, “Oh ,you're so intimidating.” I used to take such exception to that after a while. For the beginning, it was like, “Oh, [inaudible 00:08:45],” and I'm like, “You're not intimidating.” I have a high standard of work and a high standard of expectation if you work for me. Because whoever I'm working for has an expectation of me. I'm not dropping the ball, and therefore you're not dropping the ball, because I'm not going to look bad. And whatever you need so that you can make yourself look good, we all look good, then you need to let me know what that is and I will make sure that that happens.

Tina: One of the things I'm probably very proud of being a boss or a director or manager or whatever is that, self-development and development of the people that work for me was always over most. You need to leave me better than when you came to me. And for people on my team to be intimidated by, "Oh, she's so intimidating, [inaudible 00:09:41], and it's just ... And finally one day just said, 'Okay, I'm not listening to that, not one more minute.'"

Tina: If you can't get yourself together. I'm giving you the opportunity to better yourself, to learn more, to do more, and not demanding, because it's not a requirement when I do your review, it's just I'm offering you an opportunity. I'm not evaluating you on this, but if you're intimidated because I say, "Why don't you go take that class?" That's your problem, not mine. And what I finally got to, and what I think a lot of us need to get to is, people's behavior all the time does not have anything to do with you. It's about them. It's about them and their insecurities and their not being able to feel.

Nichole: So how do you feel after hearing Tina's journey with being perceived as intimidating and getting comfortable with herself, how does that make you feel about your level of drive and the way that it's perceived by others?

Aseloka: I've definitely had that intimidating ... I've heard that word bandied about.

Nichole: Bandied about. That is the ... What's what's the setting in which you've heard this word?

Aseloka: So, for Tina it was at work. But for me, it's just been personally. In some of my relationships with people, friendships and things like that, people have perceived me as intimidating, because I am someone who

... I know what I want. And I think maybe even more than that is, that I am someone who wants to talk things out. I want to have a very open discussion about what is happening. I don't like being passive-aggressive, I don't like tiptoeing around things. No, I want to have a conversation about it. I think people perceive that as me being very direct and maybe sometimes harsh or intimidating. And that's when I'm just ... It's just so frustrating, because again, my only goal is a solution and it's just not always perceived that way.

Aseloka: I am perceived sometimes as being bossy or trying to manage things too much and that's never my intent. I try to reflect too, and think, "Am I being unreasonable?" Are people just perceiving me this way and there's nothing I can do about it?

Aseloka: I don't mean to deflect and say it's always someone else, but I've done a lot of soul searching and a lot of therapy to try to reconcile because for me, it's sometimes gotten to the point where I just feel so bad about it, because again, that's never what I want. I don't want anyone to feel intimidated ever by me.

Nichole: Why?

Aseloka: But that's also not something that I ... Oh, that's a good question.

Nichole: Some people want that, it's better to be feared than loved, thing.

Aseloka: No. I just don't believe that. I just don't believe in it. I feel like we're all better off if we feel safe and cared for. And so, I want to provide that sort of an environment. And I think maybe this is where things break down is, that for me, that does not mean that we don't have hard conversations. That doesn't mean that you get a pass on everything. That doesn't mean that I'm not ever upset or disappointed, but it does mean as ... I feel like as someone who cares about people, it is my

responsibility to have the discussion with you about what it is that I'm thinking, feeling concerned about in a reasonable, respectful way, so that we can get from where we are to where we want to be.

Aseloka: And I think for a lot of people being kind and caring means we skip over that really hard conversation. And I don't believe that that's okay. I don't. I don't ever want to be someone who just brushes past. Also, because what happens over time is that, when we don't really talk about and hash things out, we become resentful. And that over time erodes the quality of the relationship. And I don't ever want that. And so I'm always trying to find a way to balance, okay, we're going to talk about this really hard thing, and I will press for that. And so I think that's where things sort of get ... I don't know. Wires cross.

Nichole: That's where you being intimidating perception comes from.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Tina: My father told me once, "If you want to be at the top, it can be very lonely there." And so for me, because I wanted to be better, it was lonely. And also, I'm just a different person, period. I have a little thing in my phone that says ... It's a picture of all these little white lambs and one little black, and it says, "It's good to be different." I look at that every morning, cause it took me a while to be okay with just being different. Not being like everybody. And I knew that a long time. I'm a non-conformist. I do not go along with the crowd. I'm not a follower, although I know when to follow. But it is hard. It is hard.

Nichole: And that's like a journey to getting to acceptance, because the people may not change, but then how you move around in the world and feel about yourself, that's the thing that needs to grow and evolve.

Aseloka: Yeah, absolutely. Because I cannot change those people. I don't have any control over what they perceive of me, their thoughts. I can't do anything about that. The only thing that can change is me.

Nichole: Right.

Aseloka: Yeah.

Nichole: How do you balanced that out in the end though? Knowing that people are going to perceive this desire to maintain a healthy relationship by talking and being open, they're going to perceive it as intimidating, but it is something that is fundamentally important to you that you cannot just let go of.

Aseloka: Yeah. I've come to the realization that that's who I am as a person. I feel like I have been able to adjust to some degree. That's something that's important to me, that's a non negotiable. If we're going to be in relationship in any authentic way, I need to know that we can have this conversation. When and how we have that conversation, I feel like that's something that I can adjust. Not everyone is ready at any time. I want to sit down and hash it out today. Right now.

Nichole: I'm always ready.

Aseloka: I'm always ready. I stay ready. But that's not how everybody processes things. Not everybody's on the same page as I am. So, it's fine for me to hang back sometimes. Sometimes people need some time. Sometimes people need space, and I can give in that way. You might not be ready to have this conversation and I have to be respectful of that. That might mean that there's some space between us for a while. That's also okay.

Aseloka: I am someone who believes in redemption and reconciliation. I really try not to cut people off. I want to give everyone the opportunity to have a healthy, meaningful relationship. It's not always possible, but I

want to be someone who is open at the very least and I'm learning to be more patient in terms of what that looks like, and in terms of, again, when and how those conversations happen.

Nichole: Actually, I don't know if this is true or not. Do you think you learned any of that from Tina? Does it have anything to do with your conversations with her?

Aseloka: I don't think I learned it from Tina. I think I've seen Tina execute and that's been exceptional. Every time I get on the phone with her, I'm like, "Oh." It's, it's never that she tells me anything that I don't know, but it's always like, "Oh, man, I forgot." That's something that I need to have top of mind. And a lot of it for me is, is being okay with this is who I am. I am that person who's always going to want to have the conversation. That is who I am. And that's fine. That's not something I have to change. I just haven't settled into this is me and that's fine. I'm, I'm working on it and I'm definitely getting closer every single day. I'm growing and learning and I am so grateful. I'm grateful to have women like Tina in my life, who can show me what that looks like. Because she's always just got this level of calm and is always just able to admit when she's been upset or she's been hurt. But I appreciate seeing that example.

Tina: What makes me, me? My ability to be open, to care for people, to care about this world, what happens in this world, what's happening in this life. To not allow what's happening to make me shut down, become hard and distant. The resilience to love, no matter how many times I've been disappointed. I still think there's a guy out there who's mine, for me. Just not giving up. My eclectic sense of going through life and being open to see, even when you don't talk about things with ... Even with

people. I was always the girl who befriended those who didn't have a friend. Wanted to bring home the people that didn't have a friend. And just my style and how I see things and go through. What makes me uniquely me is that I'm happy to be who I am. I don't want to be anybody else.

Nichole: I had this vision of myself when I was going to ... I'm 33 now. So, I had this vision of myself in my 30s where I am just fully self-actualized. Nothing's a problem. I know exactly who I am and what I want and it has not exactly turned out.

Aseloka: Oh, really? Gee, I wouldn't have expected that.

Nichole: I don't know. It's unbelievable. You're never going to guess this, but it didn't exactly work that way. Do you feel like ... I don't know. Can you relate at all? Did you have a similar vision of your 30s, you're going to have it all together?

Aseloka: I didn't have a similar vision of my 30s specifically, but I did feel at some point ... I think I've just still been waiting like, "All right, when is it? Is this the moment? Is this it? Am I there yet?"

Nichole: Right. "Am [crosstalk 00:22:05] I self-actualized now? Did it just happen?"

Aseloka: "Is [crosstalk 00:22:07] it happening? Am I doing it right now?" So, I didn't have a specific time in mind that I thought that that would happen. But I'm still just hoping for that moment. But I think overall, it's not a thing ... If you can imagine, it's not a thing that happens at a time.

Nichole: No. It can't be scheduled.

Aseloka: I know, shocker. It's not a thing that happens at a time. I'm getting more and more comfortable every day with who I am and surrounding

myself with people who can remind me of all of the important things of life. Remind me of what I want for myself. Remind me that it's okay to be who I am, where I am right now, today. And that I'm worthy of care and concern and love, as I am today.

Aseloka: I heard someone say ... I wish I knew who it was, but I don't. But I heard someone say that it's okay to be both a masterpiece and a work in progress.

Nichole: Oh, yeah.

Aseloka: Yeah, at the same time. I know. Which is ultra corny also. It's 100% true and I love it.

Nichole: Oh, I love that.

Aseloka: Yeah. Yeah. I'm learning every day through the people that I surround myself with, the things that I choose to do with my time, through therapy, through my own self care and processing, that I don't have to be perfect right now, and also, I am wonderful and still getting there. I don't have to wait to be okay with who I am until I've reached a certain thing, until I've self-actualized or whatever. I can be happy with myself wholly and fully, today, right now, and also realize that there's still work that I need to do.

Nichole: Yeah.

Aseloka: Azalia, I really appreciated your encouraging words and all of chapter eight of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. I think we can all use that sort of encouragement to be proud of the work that we do and to do work worth doing. And thank you for listening as I work through some of my thoughts about your writing.

Aseloka: Today's episode was the last episode of the season, but we'll be back later this year with season two. I'm really looking forward to more of

our conversations. For the last time, for a little while, Sincerely,  
Aseloka.

Aseloka: The Colored Girl Beautiful was created and it's hosted by me, Aseloka Smith. This episode was produced by Asoleka Smith, with editing help from Nichole Hill. Music is from Blue Dot Sessions and Epidemic Sounds.

Aseloka: Azalia is your favorite book. Always there for you to return to again and again when you need something to read that you know will make you smile.

Aseloka: This is it guys, at least for now. We'll be back later this year with season two, but we're not going to leave you hanging. Be sure to stay tuned to our feed for bonus episodes between now and the start of season two. For everything you ever wanted to know about the show and the original book that inspired the show, you can visit [coloredgirlbeautiful.com](http://coloredgirlbeautiful.com). There, you can subscribe to our newsletter, follow us on social media, or purchase your very own Colored Girl Beautiful T-shirt. If you like what you hear, send it to a friend. We want everybody to know about the show and we need your help. So go ahead. Use that little share button in your pod catcher. And if you have a second, give the show a five star rating on Apple Podcasts and Pod Chaser. Links for both in the show notes. The Colored Girl Beautiful is produced with support from PRX and the Google Podcast creators program. Thank you so very much for listening and we'll see you around.

Nichole: I still couldn't find that song.

Aseloka: Oh, the Kirk Franklin song? It wasn't (singing).

Aseloka: That was just beyond popular. [crosstalk 00:27:00]

Nichole: So good.

Aseloka: For that to start up ... A round of that to start up in service, was like, what?

Nichole: And the most exciting thing to me was the knowledge that we were going to at some point get to (singing).

Nichole: And then it's going to be like (singing).

Aseloka: We have the key change (singing).

Nichole: Yes. The key change is just like ... And then it's like ... Everything basically that you [crosstalk 00:27:34] would want in a gospel song is going to be there. And then we're going to cut the music, and we're going to clap for a while. And then we're coming back, we're coming.

Aseloka: So good. Oh [crosstalk 00:27:49] my gosh.

Nichole: So good. It was like a concert in one song.

Aseloka: Oh, man. It was amazing. The hypest gospel concert in one song.

Nichole: Yes.

Aseloka: So good.

Nichole: Oh, I love that song. That was a.

# Appendix D – Varied Social Media Posts

Figure D-1: Instagram Post



## Figure D-2: Twitter Post



Figure D-3: Facebook Post



**Colored Girl Beautiful**  
October 1, 2019 · 🌐

After months and months of hard work, it's finally here! Episode 1 of The Colored Girl Beautiful is finally available! Listen, download and subscribe today! And don't forget to tell a friend!!

#podcast #podcasting #podcastlife #podcaster  
#podcastersofinstagram #podcastlove #podcastaddict  
#blackpodcast #blackpodcastnetwork #blackpodcaster  
#blackpodcastersunited #blackpodcasthost #blackwomenpodcasts  
#shepodcasts #womenpodcast #coloredgirlbeautiful  
#dopeblackpods #podsincolor ... See More



52  
People Reached

3  
Engagements

[Boost Post](#)

3

Like   Comment   Share

Comment as Colored Girl Beautiful

# Appendix E – Google Podcasts creators program

## Overview

I first learned about the Google Podcasts Creators Program at Third Coast International Audio Festival. There was a booth outside of the main conference ballroom encouraging people to apply. The program offered 20 weeks of intensive podcast training and \$40,000 in order to produce your show. Applications were open to anyone with an interest in podcasting no matter the level experience but you had to have a podcast idea worth developing. As someone who didn't work at a public radio station and wasn't quite planning to make podcasting her life, this felt like a very big leap for me. Third Coast is a sizeable conference mostly filled with professional journalists who work at public radio stations and tell stories for a living. Given the company I was in, I felt underqualified. I was intrigued but not quite convinced that I should apply.

WerkIt! came not long after Third Coast and was a much smaller conference and there were opportunities to talk with the staff at PRX, the company that was running the program. After a few conversations with some of the staff I made the decision to submit my application. While none of the team members I spoke with were on the selection committee, those I did speak with were encouraging and helped me better understand that I actually was the right sort of application.

## Application

The Application for the program was not terribly long, but the questions were thorough. This was clearly not something to take lightly. PRX asked for in-depth information about the show's elevator pitch, format, and audience. They also asked for a one-year budget for the show. And perhaps most nerve-rackingly they asked for an audio sample to get an idea of what the show would sound like. It was a lot of work for just a handful of selections

[\[Appendix G – Google Podcasts creators program Application Materials\]](#)

## Selection

Ultimately my podcast, which I also called *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, was selected alongside 5 other teams to participate in this program. The five other podcast teams were Afroqueer, Las Raras, Long Distance, Timestorm and Who Taught You How to Drive. While I was notified of my selection on December 17<sup>th</sup>, I was not able to share that information until January of 2019. We were the first official cohort of the Google Podcasts creators program.

Being selected for this program is definitely the foundation of my storytelling and figuring out the format for my show. It also enabled me to hire my producer Nichole Hill, who has no doubt been essential to the show's success as well as a familiar and welcome voice on the show itself.

## Program

The program started off with a 1-week long bootcamp explaining the setup for the program and introducing us to the concepts we would employ of the course of our 5 months training. The program lasted for 20 weeks and once every month for about three days all 6 teams and the training to would get together either virtually or in person to discuss and present our progress. These were called Creative Reviews.

For each Creative Review we were given a single objective. These objectives would generally involve a Google slides pitch presentation and an audio sample of up to about five minutes.

The last event of these monthly sessions was always the Pitch presentation which would include our audio sample. These presentations were public but were also evaluated by a group of four industry professionals who gave pointed feedback at the end of our presentation.

Feedback was a vital part of how we were expected to improve our shows. The phrase “Feedback is a gift,” was cited often. We received feedback from industry professionals, from the training team, from one another and even from the public. We were encouraged to welcome feedback and to learn when it was important to make changes to content and when to stand our ground. Either way feedback should be taken graciously.

Much to my surprise, Design Thinking was also a big part of PRX’s approach to teaching storytelling. The idea was to define your audience, use that audience as inspiration and to prototype often and iterate on your ideas. This was especially interesting as a design student seeing how Design Thinking is applied outside of the design world. Overall, I found this to be a helpful approach and it definitely helped focus my work.

## Audience

A significant portion of the Design Thinking PRX as taught by PRX was defining your audience. To do this we talked as many people as we possibly could and among them

tried to identify folks who might be listeners for our show. After having done that we would further narrow our focus by selecting one ideal interviewee as our User POV (Point of View) and create a statement describing them. From there we were to complete any planning activities with our User POV in mind, allowing that to help drive decision making.

For *The Colored Girl Beautiful* we selected a young woman name Jasmin as our POV.

Jasmin: 31-year-old black professional with a Master's degree who loves great storytelling and wants to learn more about the ways in which societal expectations have affected black women throughout history up through the present.

As we wrote for the show, we tried to keep Jasmin in mind. Would this topic interest her? Would she find this conversation interesting? Would Jasmin identify with any of the questions being raised for this episode. Although it was a lot to wrap our heads around first, it was a useful tool in helping us to narrow down who exactly the show is for. This prevented us from making a show for everyone which would have ended up a show for no one.

### Program Completion

At the end of the program all six teams participated in a live Showcase presentation. This took place at a WBUR's City Space in Boston on June 19, 2019. Each team did a special live performance that gave an overview of their show. The show was hosted by Dylan Marron, host of the popular podcast *Conversations With People Who Hate Me*. For *The Colored Girl Beautiful* we chose a live storytelling presentation that gave a history of why the show was created. This was my first live storytelling experience

and I was extremely nervous. But the experience itself was exhilarating. This sort of storytelling is one of the reasons I love podcasts, so I felt fortunate to be able to do so on stage.

### Season One of Podcast Production

This journey has been one of the most rewarding and challenging things I've ever done in my life. I am incredibly proud of the work I've done. I've created a show, specifically for Black women, with exceptional audio quality, a unique format and wonderful stories. The show is out in the world now and available for download where podcasts are found! But there is certainly still some room for improvement.

While the storytelling for season one was wonderful, they were not always as in-depth as I would have liked. I usually only had the chance to interview a storyteller one time in most cases which meant that I wasn't always able to follow-through with a particular thought we found interesting if I didn't happen to get more information during the interview. I was also under a very short timeline. While planning of the show started early, being in production while also releasing episodes kept us on our toes. Most episodes took about a month to turn around which is exceptionally short considering that there are only two people who also work full-time pulling together every aspect of the story. Teams of 5 or 6 people put out a seven-episode season over the course of a year or more and that's pushing it. So my producer and I were constantly pressed for time. That said, I did well considering the circumstances, but the plan is to allow more planning time for the next season.

# Appendix F – Google Podcasts creators program Application Materials

Figure F-1: Google Podcasts creators program Application Submission form (page 1)

PRX	Powered by Submittable 
Your Name	<b>Aseloka Smith</b> 12/03/2018
	by <b>Aseloka Smith</b> in <b>Apply to Google Podcasts creator program</b> id. 11747349
	1013 Beards Hill Rd, M-7 Aberdeen, Maryland 21001 MD United States 4435999577 aseloka.smith@gmail.com
<b>Original application</b>	12/03/2018
Your Email	<b>aseloka.smith@gmail.com</b>
Organization Name (if applicable)	<b>The Colored Girl Beautiful</b>
Country	<b>United States</b>
Language	<b>English</b>
Who is on your team?	<b>My team currently consists of myself. I do get some production/editing help from my mentor as well and have planned for editing and production assistance in my budget. It is possible that my mentor, Kim Fox (The Podcast Professor) may be able to serve in this capacity under contract for the duration of my project but she will not official be a part of my team to attend training.</b>
Expanding Voices in the Industry	<b>My team will be made up of entirely black women and the podcast content we create will be intended primarily for black women ages 24-36. I also believe that audiences of all backgrounds will benefit in hearing stories about black women.</b>

Figure F-2: Google Podcasts creators program Budget

The Colored Girl Beautiful Podcast Production Budget						
Line Item	Sub-Items	Price	Cost	Qty	Total	
<b>Production Costs</b>						
<b>\$55,905.00</b>						
<b>Payment/Episode to Myself (Cost Per Year @ approx. 8 Episodes/Year)</b>						
	Myself as Writer/Editor		300	8	2400	
<b>Personnel (Cost Per Year)</b>						
	Myself as Host/Producer		1000	8	8000	
	Lead Producer		925	8	7400	
	Editor		800	8	6400	
	Content/Communications/Marketing Strategist		750	8	6000	
	Mixer/Engineer		800	8	6400	
	Administrative Virtual Assistance (Approx. 15 hours/episode)		675	8	5400	
	Fact Finding/Fact Checker		500	8	4000	
<b>Media/File Storage (Cost Per Year)</b>						
	Dropbox Subscription (3 Business Users)		240	3	720	
	SD Cards		60	3	180	
	External Hard Drive		150	1	150	
<b>Equipment and Software Maintenance/Replacement</b>						
	Replace Old/Outdated Equipment		1000	1	1000	
	Adobe Creative Cloud Subscription		60	12	720	
	Software Upgrade		350	1	350	
	Computer Updgrade/Maintenance		1500	1	1500	
<b>Website (Cost Per Year)</b>						
	Webhosting		240	1	240	
	Domain Name Renewal		15	1	15	
	Audio hosting (dedicated RSS feed)		180	1	180	
					0	
<b>Travel (2 Trips Per Year for 3 Days)</b>						
	Lodging		700	2	1400	
	Meals		25	18	450	
	Transportation		500	2	1000	
	Car Rental		150	2	300	
<b>Tape Syncs (Cost Per Year @ approx. 8 Episodes/Year)</b>						
	Cost per Sync (Including Travel)		170	10	1700	
<b>Live Events</b>						
<b>\$1,675.00</b>						
<b>In-Person Events (1 Event in First Year)</b>						
	Venue		800	1	800	
	Catering		500	1	500	
	Photography/Videography		600	1	600	
	Talent/Entertainment		400	1	400	
	Communication/Promotion		500	1	500	
	Ticket Revenue	25	45		1125	0
<b>Design and Media Assets</b>						
<b>\$3,400.00</b>						
<b>Transcription</b>						
	Descript		45	12	540	
<b>Music</b>						
	Yearly Epidemic Sound Subscription		600	1	600	
	Story Blocks Unlimited Audio		15	12	180	
	Bluedot Sessions (License 4 Tracks per Episode @ Approx. \$40/Track)		260	8	2080	
<b>Income</b>						
<b>\$13,240.00</b>						
<b>In-Person Events (Cost Per Year @ approx. 2 Events/Year)</b>						
	YouTube Ad Revenue (Year 1)	40	12	480	0	
	Ad Revenue	800	8	6400	0	
	Patreon Contributions (per month)	350	12	4200	0	
	Merchandise Revenue (15 Items/Month at \$12 Profit Per Item)	180	12	2160	0	
					Total Revenue	Total Expenses
					\$14,365.00	\$62,105.00
					<b>\$14,365.00</b>	
					<b>\$62,105.00</b>	
					<b>\$47,740.00</b>	

# Appendix G – Technical Details of Creating Audio

## Equipment

In order to ensure the level of sound quality I was going after, I did lots of research on which equipment to purchase. I finally settled on the following items for recording:

- AudioTechnica BP-40 Broadcast Microphone
- Zoom F8n Audio Recorder and Audio Interface
- AudioTechnica 875R Cardioid Shotgun Microphone
- Tascam DR-70D Audio Recorder
- Zoom H6 Audio Recorder
- Tabletop Micophone Stands
- Microphone Stands
- XLR Cords (Various Lengths)
- XLR to 3.5mm Cord

## Recording Scenarios

Each recording session came with different conditions. These conditions had to be met

- In-“Studio” Recording for Tracking – Tracking in radio is defined as the narration that goes along for a recorded piece. For this type of recording I use one or two AudioTechnica BP-40 Broadcast microphones plugged into a Zoom F8n Recorder or Tascam DR-70D recorder. This was used for the vast majority of recording sessions and offered the best audio quality and external noise

cancellation. Many of these recordings took place in-“studio” which I’ve set up permanently in my basement.

- “Run-and-Gun” Recording – Quick recordings taken outside of a controlled studio environment were referred to as Run-and-Gun recordings. For these conditions I most frequently used the AudioTechnica 875R Cardioid Shotgun Microphone with the Tascam DR-70D.
- Virtual Recording (for Guests) – I define these recordings as any recording where my guest is not with me in person. This would consist of an AudioTechnica BP-40 Broadcast microphone plugged into a Zoom F8n Recorder or Tascam DR-70D recorder which would record my voice and a XLR to 3.5 conversion cord plugged into the recorder and to my cell phone to record the voice of my guest. This was the simplest and also the most reliable method of recording with a guest remotely and did not require my guest to have an internet connection.
- Virtual Recording (with Producer) – Occasionally, I would need to record conversations with my producer where we were not in the room together since my producer lives in DC. In order for this to take place, we would each record separately on our end and then I will later sync the two tracks editor within the audio editor. To achieve this I would record on my end with an AudioTechnica BP-40 Broadcast microphone plugged into a Zoom F8n Recorder and she would record hers separately using an AudioTechnica BP-40 Broadcast microphone plugged into a Zoom H6 Recorder.

## Software

To edit all audio I used Adobe Audition. It was selected because it is a robust professional level software that is also readily available. It comes included with a

regular Creative Cloud subscription and did not require that I reorient to a new software. These were all essential in choosing a Digital Audio Workstation.

As for functionality, there were three main features I knew were essential. They are multitrack editing, loudness normalization, and ID3 tag editing. Thankfully, all of these features come included with Adobe Audition.

Multitrack editing was important because all interviews are recorded on separate tracks. This means that each audio file could require individual editing and/or adjustment. Multitrack editing allows this to happen seamlessly.

In order to make sure that the perceived loudness of the show was on par with other broadcast quality content, each finished episode is loudness normalized to -18 LUFS, which is right around the industry standard for podcasts. Rather have to look to an external tool to provide this functionality, Adobe Audition has this built right into its software.

The last step for any podcast episode once it's ready for export to an .mp3 is to update the file's ID3 tags. Making sure the ID3 information such as podcast title, episode name, and website are available in the .mp3 file's ID3 metadata ensures that the information associated with your file is searchable and indexable by any podcatcher or music player. While this feature is offered in plenty of other standalone software, it's convenient to be able to edit this information right inside of Audition, including the episode art which is rare.

## Staff

Because I was able to receive funding to produce *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, a large portion of that went into hiring a producer. I realized early in the process that I was going to need help shaping these stories. I was going to need someone to bounce ideas off of, someone who was dedicated to helping make this a great show. So just after completing bootcamp in Boston for the Google Podcasts creators program, I began a search for a partner in crime in earnest. I reached to several people I met at Third Coast for suggestions. One connection in particular came through with a recommendation for Nichole Hill, whom I ended up hiring.

As I mentioned previously, Nichole has been absolutely essential to this process. Because her position was so essential it was very important to me that we formalized our work together. Once Nichole was introduced to me, I requested that Nichole send over some previous stories she'd editing and worked with. Once I felt confident that she had the experience I was looking for we started off with a trial assignment where she was paid for her time but we signed a contract confirming that this would be temporary. Upon successful completion we drew up a new contract and have done so every 6 months since. We've been on a break since February and will be signing on for season two around mid-April

While Nichole is the only contractor I've hired so far, hers is the only essential role I've needed to-date. A content manager would be ideal for social media posting as well, but after several failed searches, I've made the decision to postpone filling this role. I've decided it's less of a hassle and more financially feasible for me to fill that role for the time being.

## Gathering Tape

A significant portion of the work required for the creation of each episode with gathering tape. Where would we find Black women who were willing to talk to me about each of these topics? I spread my net wide to find the answer to this question.

I settled on the topics of love, personal appearance, and self-control in my original thesis proposal. In order to make the most efficient use of the search I gathered stories on several other topics found in the book *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. These additional topics included aging, racial responsibility, friendship, ambition, and failure. So I set out to gather stories for all of these topics, including the originals, at once. I set up a webpage that listed each topic and a brief description of the type of story I was looking for. After the list of topics was a webform where submitters could give a brief introduction to their story and my producer and I could decide whether or not that story was appropriate for a given episode topic.

Once the form was setup we posted a call for stories that included this page link everywhere we could think of. We posted on the podcast's Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts, our personal accounts, we emailed everyone we knew and we asked the people in our Google Podcast creators program cohort to send folks our way too.

The form was set to send us an email with the words "Story Submission" in the subject line and the woman's name, email address and her description of her story in the body of the message. This helped keep submissions simple and relatively uniform and organized. Screening involved an approximately 20-minute phone call with someone we thought had a story that would suit our needs for the show. Screened submitters were asked to sign a consent form so that we could record the screening call in case there was any useful tape there but no screened phone calls have been

used in the show to date. Full-length one-hour interviews were scheduled with women whose stories were deemed suitable.

I made these decisions with the help of my producer and the stories that were selected were those that seemed most relevant to the topics Madame Hackley wrote about. It was also important that the content allowed a deeper exploration of the book or at very least provided a segue into that deeper contemplation so that I was able to explore some of the questions I originally asked in my proposal. I needed each story to help lead me closer to answering my six research questions:

1. How have Black women's views of topics like "love," "self-respect," and "personal appearance" changed?
2. What's different now in 2017 that did not exist in 1916 that would cause changes to the definition of black womanhood?
3. How does race impact one's self-image?
4. Have Black women been able to embrace good self-esteem for better mental health?
5. What concepts have stayed the same even though 100 years have passed?

There also had to be an element of "completeness" to the story meaning that the story had to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. There had to be an inciting incident that made the story work. Using these parameters and my thesis proposal topics as a guiding light, we forged ahead in search of good content.

In the end, there was more than enough content to choose from. We received around 80 submissions and ended up having plenty of content for our 7-episode season. We even had enough content for bonus episodes. While several of the stories used for the show came from these submissions, there were also in some cases, people I knew

personally whose had stories that I thought might fit well too and we used those stories as well.

### Script Writing and Debriefing

After the tape had been gathered, next was starting to shape the stories around the tape. We knew what the topic was for each episode so that bulk of the work from this point forward was to listen to the tape and understand how it connect to the story. Ideally if there was enough research done before the interview these connections would be clear. But there were often cases where the interview veered away from the pre-determined questions and drifted off into the land of the unknown. While somewhat inconvenient, this is often where things get interesting in an interview so it's best to let these moments happen as they will.

In listening back to types of moments and trying to connect them to the book, it would often happen that Nichole or I would discover something we hadn't anticipated. Sometimes we would find a connection to a different part of the book or a different quote that we'd originally planned. Sometimes the conversation would make us see the selected quote in a different light. Either way being open to changes in an interview made for a richer writing experience.

Rather than be rigid and try sticking to the original plan no matter what, we went where the tape took us. A key part of this was when Nichole and I discussed the tape after having collected it. This was especially important for me. Sometimes I didn't realize what I thought about a particular piece of tape until I was going over it with Nichole. And Nichole being the expert producer that she is, was great at asking just the right questions to help me consider new or interesting perspectives.

We learned early in the process to start recording these conversations. Rather than writing these questions into the script, we would record Nichole and I discussing the tape. This became a regular part of the production process. Over time it became more and more structured and turned into a semi-formal interview with me about my interview with the guest. Because Nichole and I get along so well and because Nichole is exceptionally skilled as a producer this felt like a more natural piece to include in the show. Not only does it give more of a window into my questions and concerns, it brings the listener along for the ride. We've found this organically ties together the book and the guest interview in a way that's unique that we haven't seen before.

After these conversations this is where the letter writing could start for me. The debriefing gave me a solid foundation so that I could write my letter to Azalia that generally opened and bookended the show.

### Recording Tracking

Recording the "tracking" or narration for each episode was initially my least favorite part and it was the part of the show I was worst at. The original format for the show involved much more script from me but tracking was a bit of a struggle for me. No matter what I did or how hard I tried it always sounded like I was reading. Because we wanted the show to have a more natural conversational tone, this was not going to work.

Ultimately, we ended up cutting down my letter portion to be much more brief. It came to serve as "bookend" that I used for an intro and outro to a specific quote of Madame Hackley's book. This made recording tracking much simpler and more importantly more natural sounding.

What also helped recording sound more natural was time. Over the months I've become much more comfortable behind the microphone so it's getting easier and easier all the time to speak naturally without much direction. The conversation between Nichole and I was originally used as a way to get some of my thoughts across more organically rather than read. But as time has gone on, my tracking has become more and more natural-sounding rather than sounding like I was reading.

## Audio Editing

Once the guest interview tape has been gathered and all tracking has been recorded. All of the audio must be edited together to make up the show. This is the most tedious piece of the process and requires lots of organization and patience.

While editing an episode may seem simple initially, when you're recording all tracks separately and only using certain snippets from any given piece of tape, things can get confusing quickly. Fortunately, Adobe Audition is professional audio editing software and is made to be able hand just this sort of task.

Figuring out how to organize this piece of the process was challenging. Key to this was logging the audio. Logging tape is a process where you listen to all of your tape, timestamp it and summarize what's happening at each timestamp. Traditionally this is done in something like Microsoft Excel or a Word document.

Logging my audio was not something that I saw value in, initially. But a few episodes in I really began to understand its benefits, especially since I was working on the audio with my producer. Without it, you would have to more or less hunt through every piece of tape you have for sound bites only by listening. And that's nearly impossible to do over multiple sessions, not to mention time-consuming. Logging

audio gives you a visual reference you can skim through when looking for something relevant to put into the timeline. Since starting to incorporate audio-logging into the production process, it's made the work of editing go that much faster. So now, any tape being used needs to be logged.

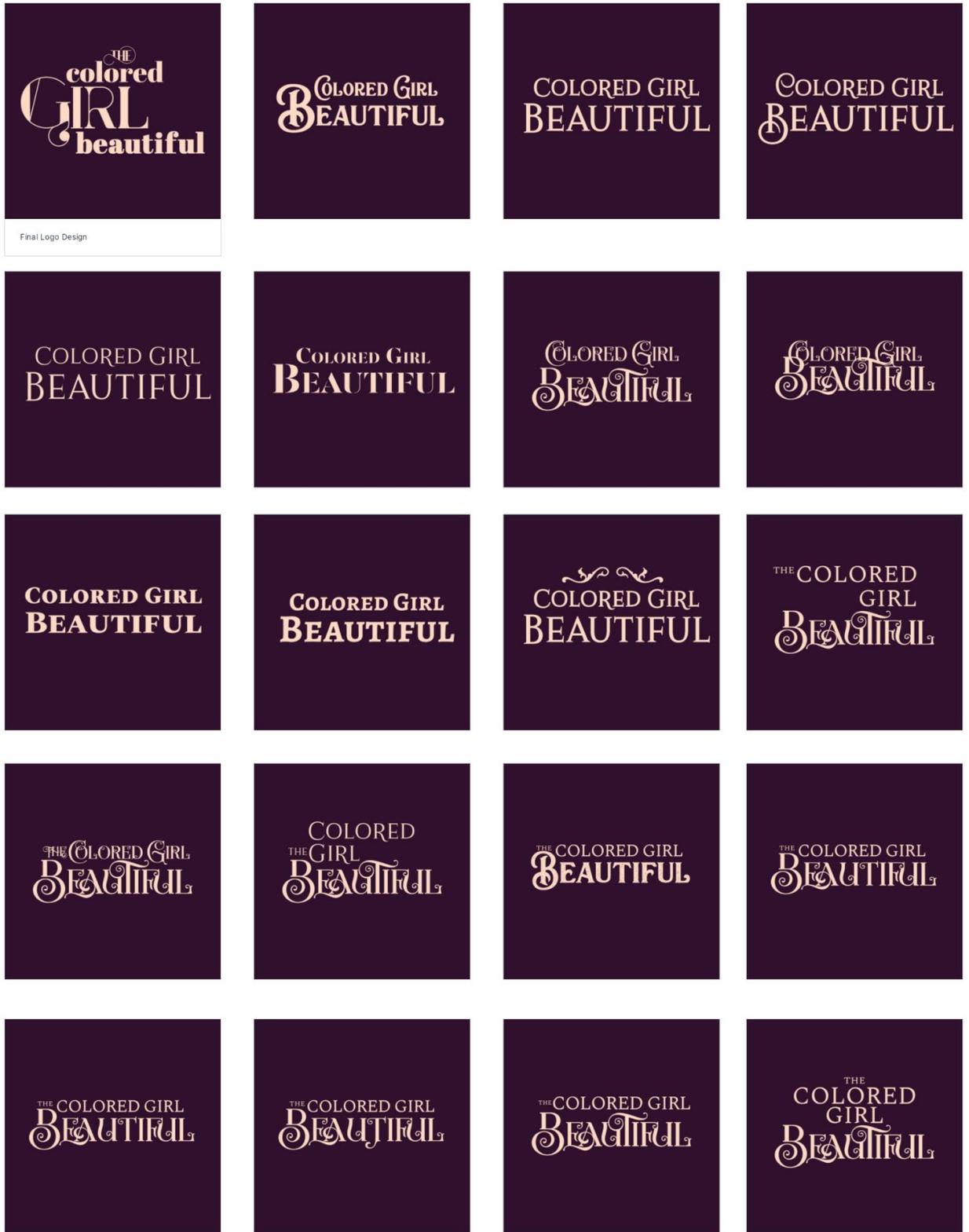
While I did come to see the benefit of logging audio, the normal method of logging audio in Microsoft Excel or Word were not appealing to me at any point. The visual reference is necessary but it's still very slow. After painstakingly writing out timestamps and a short description in Excel, you then have to toggle between your Excel document and your editing software and hunt for the timestamp in your tape in order to pull it into your timeline. That was less than ideal for me. I wanted to find a way to bring my audio log into my editing Adobe Audition. Many professional podcasters use Avid ProTools to edit their audio so most of the organizing solutions I came across involved ProTools which is setup completely differently. But I searched many forums and ended up tweeting with an Adobe employee to find a better solution for logging audio inside of Adobe Audition.

To get around the clunky manual process and work with a solution that made sense with Audition I realized I should be marking pieces of tape within Adobe Audition using the time selection tool and then naming that marker. This allows me to mark a section of time, give it a description, and then Audition will create the timestamp for me. Then if I need a quick and dirty list of all of the markers and their description for a writing log which is sometimes quicker to read through, I just use the Export Markers tool which will automatically generate a csv file for me. This method is especially useful because it's quick, simple, and versatile. It also saves the markers to the audio file itself so if I ever need to reuse this tape, as long as I'm using the same file, those markers will always be attached. But even with all of that, none of these

items are even the most valuable feature of using markers in Adobe Audition. The most significant benefit for this method is that it gives me quick access to the short snippet of audio I need. Once I've identified the snippet of tape I want to use, I can select the corresponding marker, listen to just that snippet and then drag the snippet into my timeline without making any permanent changes or cuts to the original file. On top of all these other benefits this method is non-destructive. I could not have asked for a better solution.

Once the audio is marked and logged, putting the pieces of the show is much quicker. From there it's just a matter of choosing which tape to put on the track.

# Appendix H – Logo Iterations



# Appendix I – Brand Mood Board



# Appendix J – Brand Design Samples

The following are various samples of The Colored Girl Beautiful branding in use.

Figure J-1: Apple iTunes Screenshot

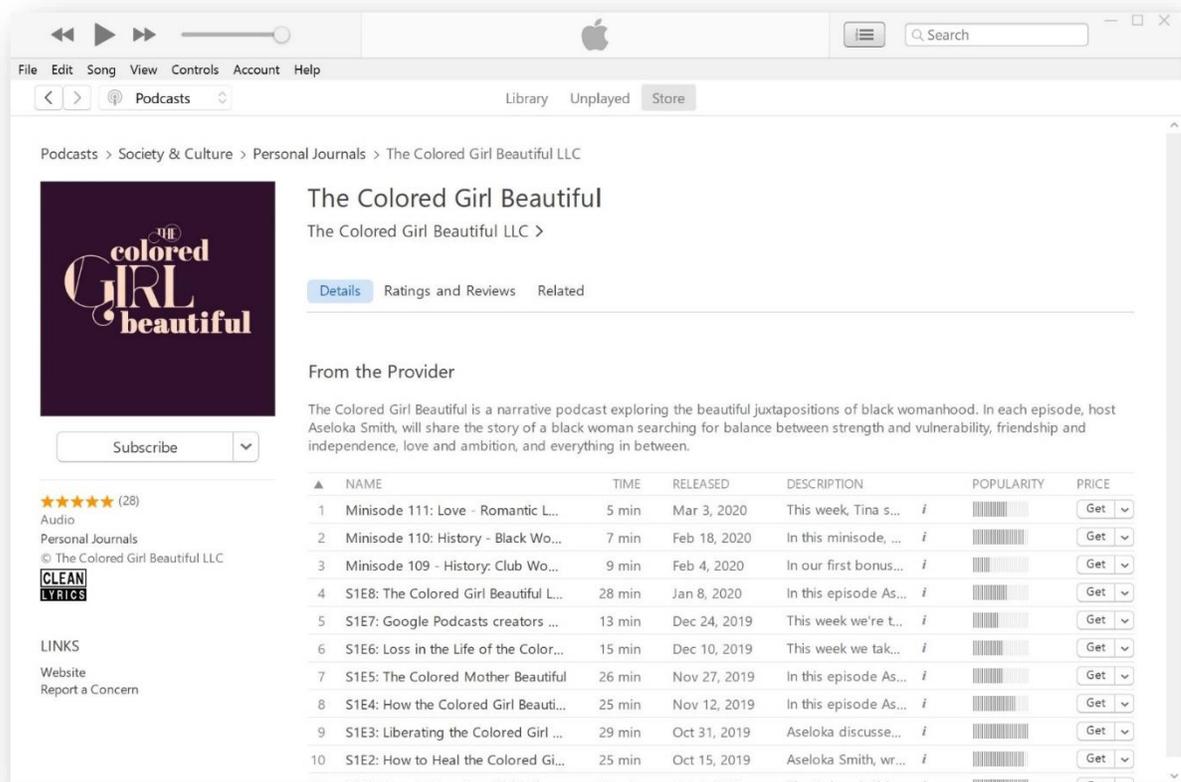


Figure J-2: Screenshot of logo in Pocket Casts widget

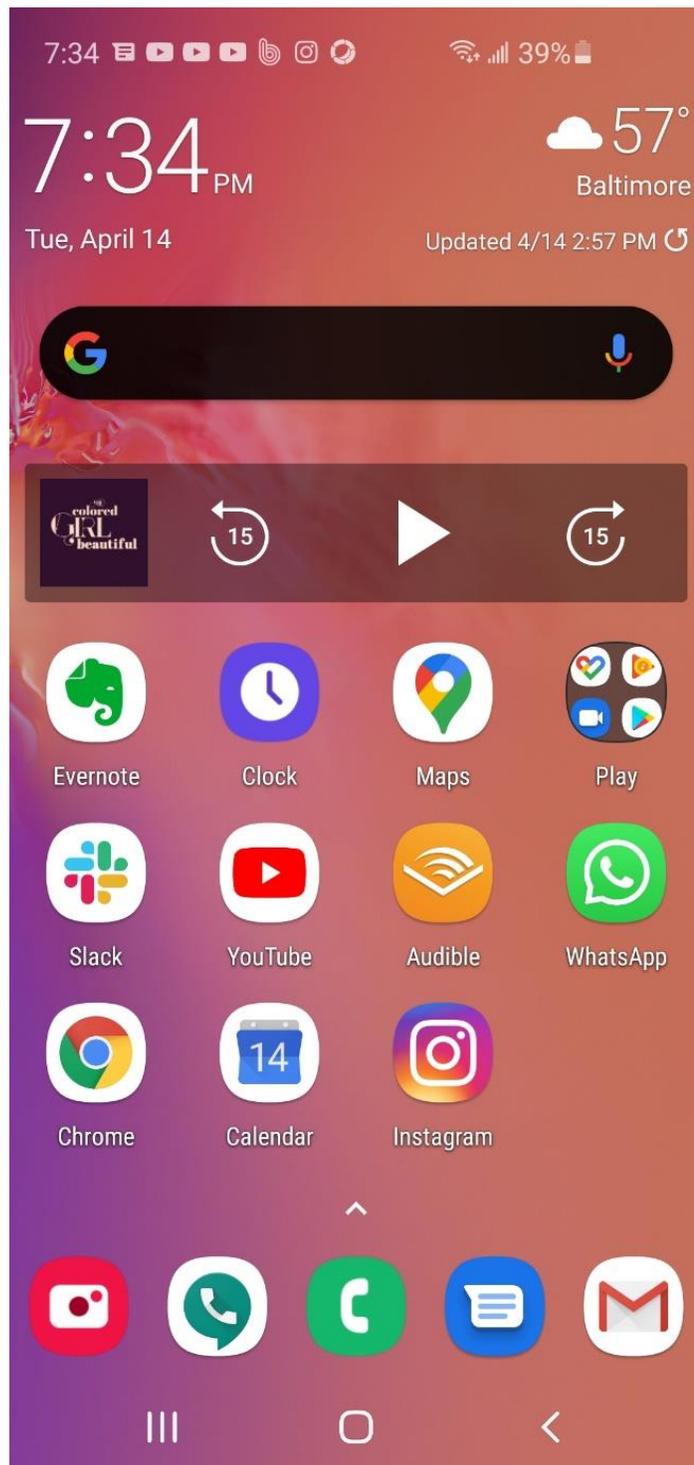


Figure J-3: Screenshot of logo in Pocket Casts Player

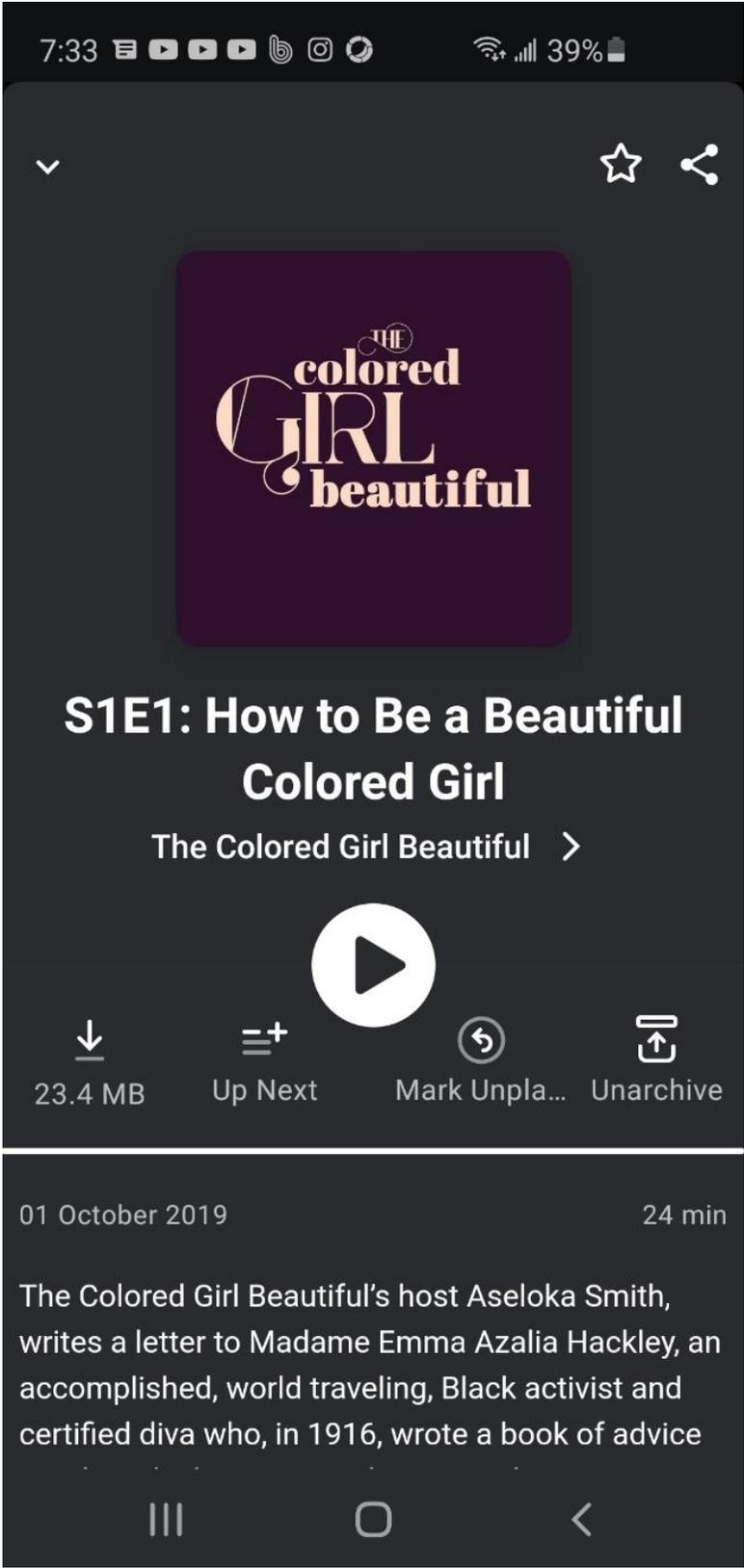


Figure J-4: Facebook Page

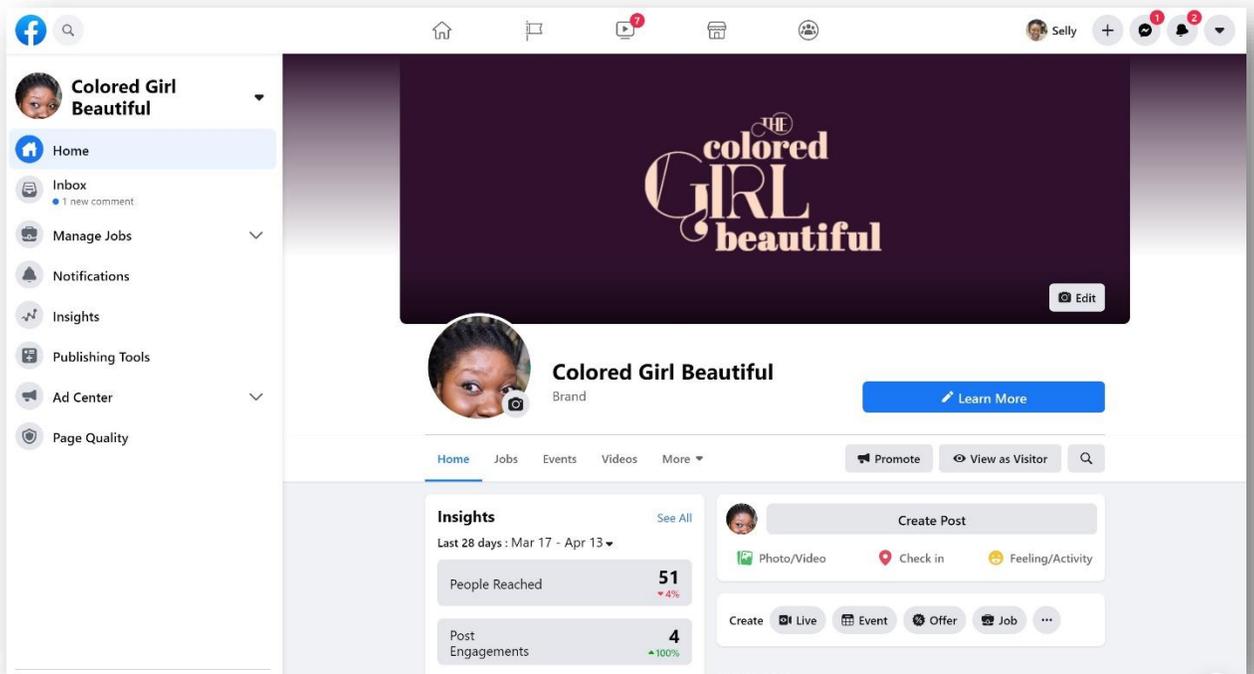


Figure J-5: Twitter Profile



Figure J-5: Instagram Profile

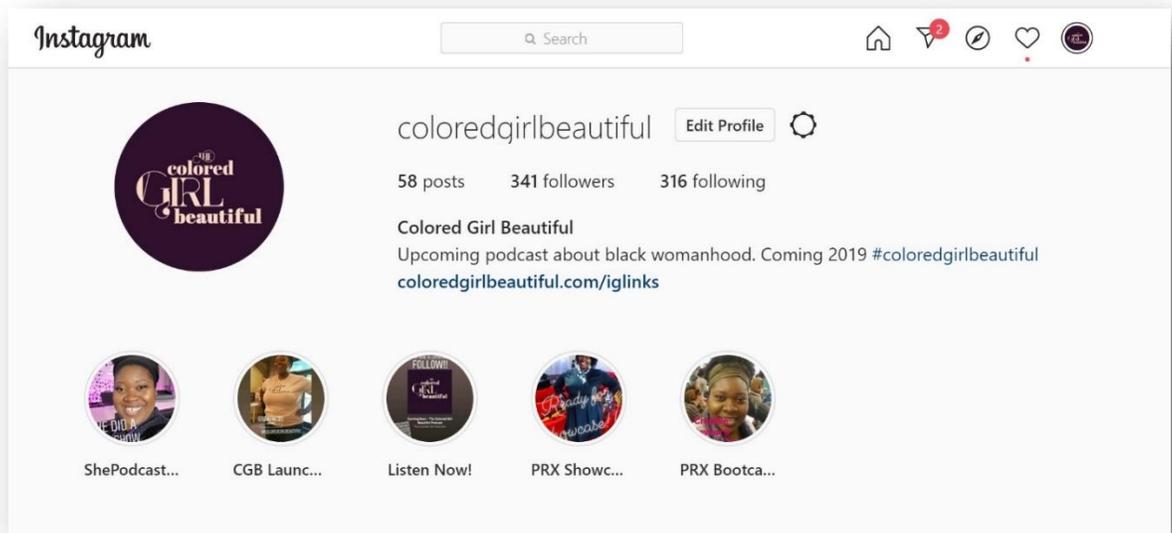
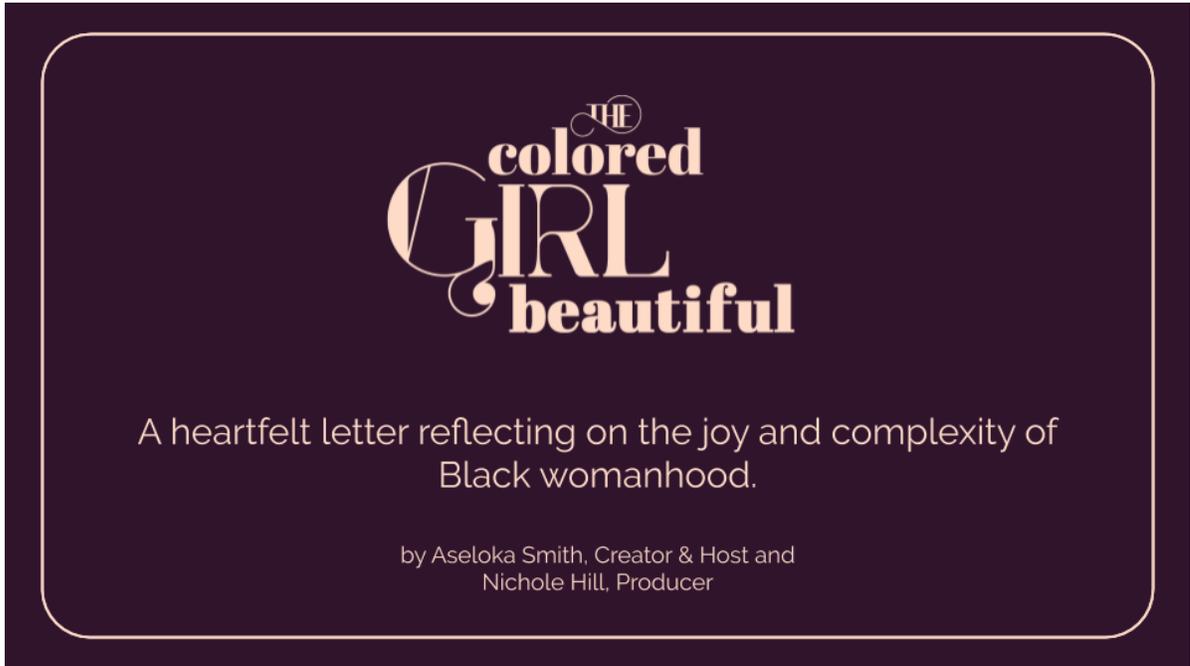


Figure J-6: The Colored Girl Beautiful T-Shirt



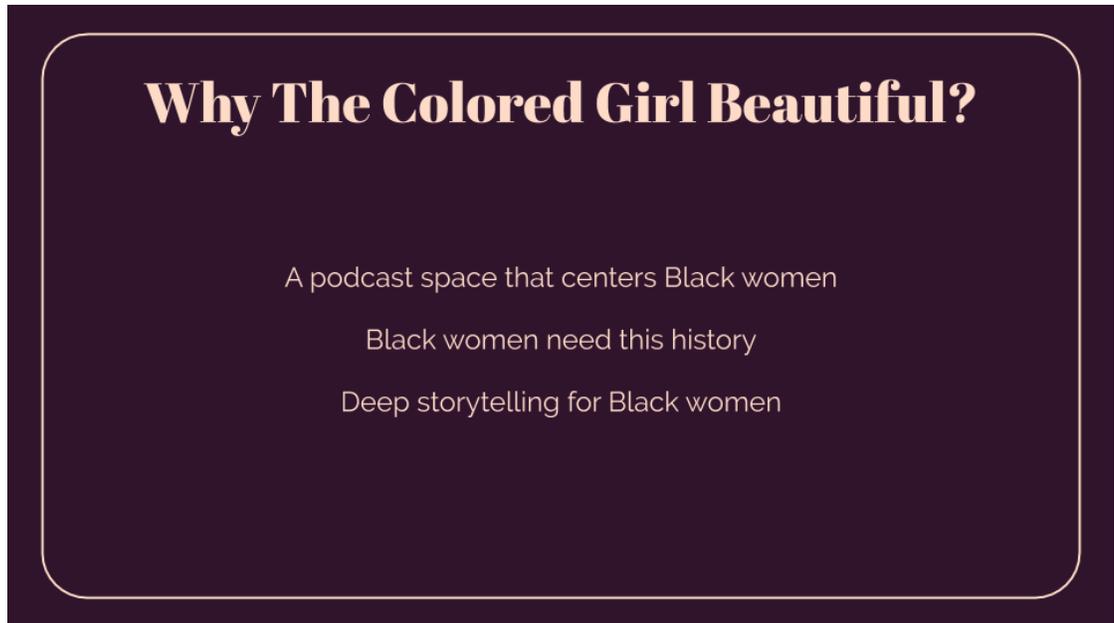
# Appendix K – Slideshow Slide

Figure K-1: Google Podcasts creators program Creative Review Presentation



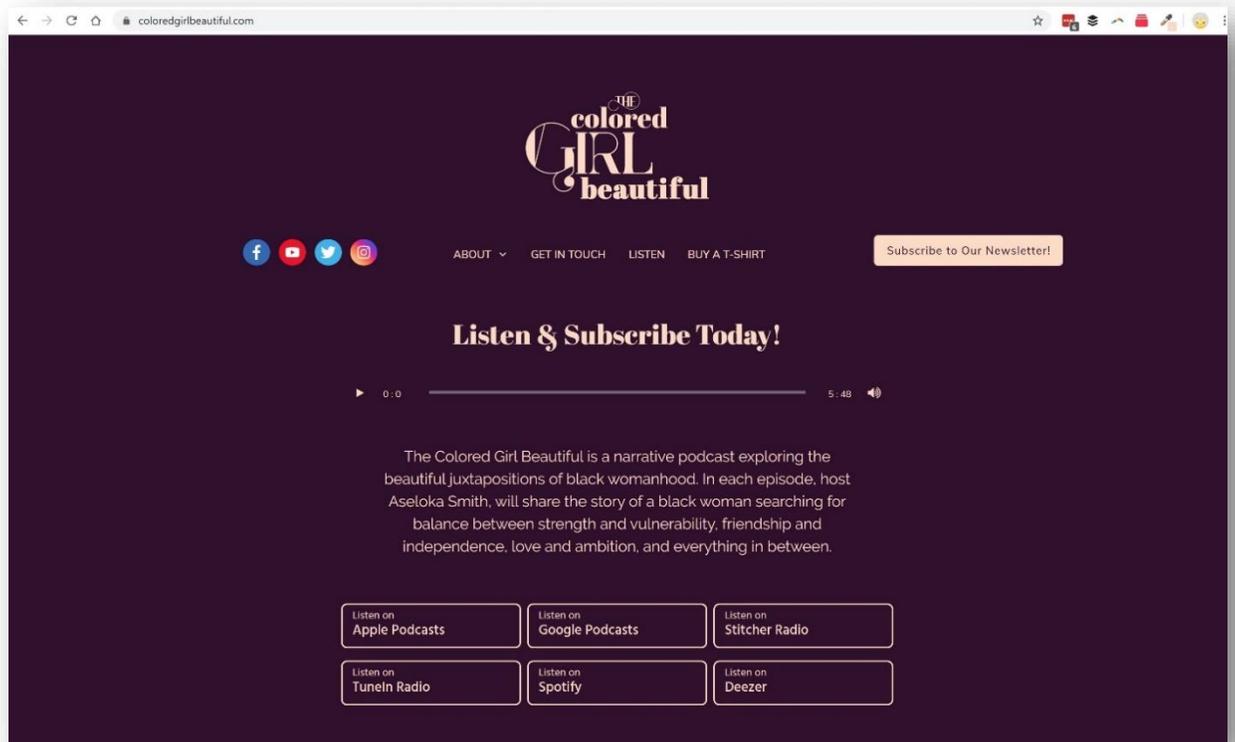
Slide 1

Figure K-2: Google Podcasts creators program Creative Review Presentation



Slide 2

# Appendix L – Website Screenshot



# Appendix M – Listener Feedback & Acknowledgements

## Listener Email 1

Hello Aseloka and Nichole,

Thank you so much for speaking with us at Grow with Google yesterday! I appreciate how open you were in speaking about the process of creating a podcast and all of the advice you shared.

I got goosebumps listening to the video clip played at the beginning—although I'm not black, my Asian family has also always cautioned against tanning and getting darker. And (as with I'm sure every single POC in America), I always struggled to make peace with my appearance within the confines of the eurocentric beauty standards that pervade every aspect of our society.

I am so glad that media made by and featuring POC are finally starting to gain some traction, and I will be eagerly following Colored Girl Beautiful and the two badass WOC who are bringing this podcast to life.

I just started working with Threshold Podcast, which focuses on environmental issues, and would love to stay in touch to trade notes and tips on marketing, audience growth, sponsorships, and all that good stuff!

Keep crushing it!!

Best,

Eva

## Listener Email 2

I love what you're doing with this podcast!!! Please, please, please get your republished version of the book out soon so people can purchase it and support the work you are doing. Otherwise somebody will make the connection and republish the book on Amazon themselves (which I assume they can freely do since the book has to be in the public domain) and make money you should be making from people like me who are listening to the podcast and wanting to read the book that inspired this all.

Figure M-1: iTunes reviews and Ratings

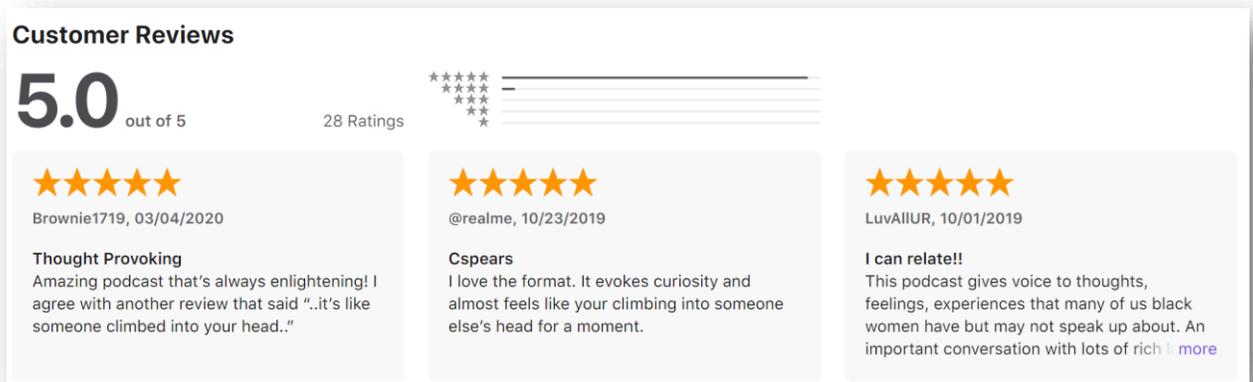


Figure M-2: New York Times Feature

### **'The Colored Girl Beautiful'**

In 1916, [Emma Azalia Hackley](#), the African-American singer and political activist, published “The Colored Girl Beautiful,” a self-help guide compiled from the talks she was giving to “colored girls in boarding schools.” In this new podcast, the host, Aseloka Smith, gauges how the advice given a century ago holds up today. Her guests — black women themselves — turn over the topics in Hackley’s book, including love, personal appearance, marriage, work and motherhood. *Oct. 1.*

# Appendix N - “We’re Looking for Stories”

## Webpage

The image shows a dark-themed webpage for 'The Colored Girl Beautiful'. At the top center is the logo, which features the text 'The colored GIRL beautiful' in a mix of serif and sans-serif fonts. Below the logo are social media icons for Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. To the right of these icons are navigation links: 'ABOUT', 'GET IN TOUCH', 'LISTEN', and 'BUY A T-SHIRT!'. Further right is a button that says 'Subscribe to Our Newsletter!'. The main heading of the page is 'We're Looking for Stories!'. Below this is a paragraph of text: 'We want to talk with black women about the topics below. If you or anyone you know has a story that fits any of these scenarios, let us know! Send us an email using the form below. Be sure to include the scenario your story relates to and give a concise description of why the story might be a good fit.' There are three columns of text, each describing a scenario: 'Care-giving vs. Self-care', 'Friendship', and 'Aging'. Below these is a 'Failure' scenario. At the bottom of the page is a form with three input fields: 'First Name' (with 'John' entered), 'Email Address' (with 'j.doe@inbox.com' entered), and 'Message' (with 'Type your message here...' as a placeholder). A large 'SEND' button is at the bottom of the form.

**The colored GIRL beautiful**

ABOUT GET IN TOUCH LISTEN BUY A T-SHIRT! [Subscribe to Our Newsletter!](#)

### We're Looking for Stories!

We want to talk with black women about the topics below. If you or anyone you know has a story that fits any of these scenarios, let us know! Send us an email using the form below. Be sure to include the scenario your story relates to and give a concise description of why the story might be a good fit.

**Care-giving vs. Self-care:** Have you ever been faced with having to choose between taking care of yourself and taking care of others? What was the specific circumstance that required you to choose? Which did you choose and why? How did that situation end up?

**Ambition:** Are you part of an ambitious couple whose relationship has faced ups and downs because of your commitment to your individual passions, careers or pursuits? Tell us about a time your passions and your relationship were in conflict? How did you resolve it?

**Friendship:** Have you encountered a situation that required you to be vulnerable with a friend(s) that you hadn't been vulnerable with before? What was the situation? Did it bring you all closer or further together?

**Racial Responsibility:** Have your feelings of guilt/obligation around needing to advance the Black race ever bumped up against your own personal interest, goals, or ambitions? What situation caused these two competing interests to collide? How did you end up balancing the two?

**Aging:** Have you found yourself forced to confront an aspect of aging that you were struggling with? What was the situation? What aspect of aging did you feel you had to confront? How did you resolve that situation?

**Failure:** Have you ever started a business and not been successful? How did you start the business? What led to it's downturn? How did you reconcile?

**First Name**  
John

**Email Address**  
j.doe@inbox.com

**Message**  
Type your message here...

**SEND**