

Less Seen/Less Heard: Stories from the Margins  
Full Episode with Adaeze Okorie and Grace Landry

- Craig Andrade: Hello, everyone. Welcome to Less Seen/Less Heard: Stories from the Margins. I'm Craig Andrade, Associate Dean of Practice, Director of the Activist Lab, professor of community health science at Boston University's School of Public Health.
- Craig Andrade: Today with me, I have Adaeze Okorie and Grace Landry, and welcome both of you. It's great to have you here with us. You each one at a time, just provide the audience an overall interview... an overall introduction of who you are. Daeze, you want to start?
- Adaeze Okorie: Sure. Thank you, Craig. So, again, my name is Adaeze Okorie. I also go by Daeze, and I'm currently in my first year of the MPH program here at Boston University's School of Public Health. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I was originally born in Nigeria, and my family moved here when I was about two years old to New Hampshire and that's where I've grown up. And that's where the origin of our story will be starting. Go ahead.
- Grace Landry: Hi. So, I'm Grace Landry, and I am a senior at Drexel University. I'm studying product design and also minoring in public health. And I also grew up in Nashua in New Hampshire which is how Adaeze and I got connected through NHARE, and yeah. Oh, and also, I guess, pronouns she, her.
- Craig Andrade: Thank you very much. So, tell us about NHARE?
- Adaeze Okorie: Oh, why don't you start, Grace?
- Grace Landry: Okay. So, I can start a little bit on what led me up to starting the petition which eventually led us to connect and co-found what is now NHARE. So, for me it was going into college my first semester, fall term of my freshman year, I had an English course taught by my professor who's now one of our mentors, Gregory Cooke.
- Grace Landry: He had a class, it's an English course actually but it was focusing on how our education system failed to teach us about... our public education failed to teach us about systemic racism in the class, really dove into what is systemic racism and understanding what race means.
- Grace Landry: And that was something that growing up White in New Hampshire, I had never even heard the term White privilege or systemic racism before that course which was baffling to me. And it was this moment where I realized my whole outlook on basically the world and the way things are functioning in our society was skewed, and I was completely incomplete. So, that was my initial moment, and then that was my fall freshman year. And so, that had been at the back of my mind as I went through college which, I guess, was over, I think it was three years which brought to 2020.

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Grace Landry: And so, after the murder of George Floyd, I realized that I didn't want to just sit and think about these things I had been sitting on and individually having conversations with family and friends but realized it was a moment where there's a lot of energy and people wanting to take action. And so, that led me to start the petition which was to end whitewashed education, social studies education, in the state of New Hampshire.

Grace Landry: Because that's when I looked back on my experiences, I felt like my education really failed to prepare me and teach and give me a complete understanding of history. And so, that petition quickly gathered a lot of support. And I think, in the first couple of weeks, I've got probably about 4,000s, or no, maybe 2,000 signatures. And that's how Daeze and I got connected. So, I guess, Daeze, if you want to give your backstory and then we can go from there?

Adaeze Okorie: For sure. So, I grew up in New Hampshire. Typically, I was either the only or one of maybe two or three students of color either in the whole school or in my class. And similar to Grace, I had this awakening moment or enlightenment moment after I had left New Hampshire and started my undergraduate education.

Adaeze Okorie: And I didn't really... I wasn't really equipped with the tools to understand the systemic nature in terms of how racism operates in a lot of our systems whether it's the education system, the justice system, employment opportunities, the wealth gap, et cetera. And so, when I took a class, it was called Controversies about Inequality, that was when we started very intentionally engaging with history in its totality and understanding how the past very much comes into play in the present and you can't separate the two.

Adaeze Okorie: And so, that was a really, really critical moment for me to be able to now engage academically with understanding how the systems are at play here. And so, then, similar to Grace in the summer of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, I felt a lot of emotions as a woman of color. A lot of it was pain, disheartened, discouragement, anger, but I also just had to do something. And that's when I saw that Grace has started this petition on Instagram.

Adaeze Okorie: And to me, this journey with NHARE has very much been one of faith, and I'm just like, "Thank, God for how things have worked in line for us to have the journey that we've had together," because I didn't know what was going to start when I DMed her on Instagram saying, "Hey, I love that you started this petition. Thank you so much. I want to get involved, and I want to see how I can help do something in this community that we're both from."

Adaeze Okorie: So, I DMed her, and then we started talking. And then, the plan now came together where we decided that we were going to do something tangible with the system or with our community. And so, it started off as New Hampshire Education Reform Initiative and we can talk more about the story, but it ended

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up being a very necessary pivot that we had to make with what our initial plan was.

Adaeze Okorie: Because we realized that as students even though we had that passion, that very valid and important experience as students in the education system, there was a piece to understanding how teachers and administrators understand the system and how it works and how to actually effectively move change forward. And so, it was conversations with those people that helped us to see what our place in making change would look like.

Craig Andrade: Conversations with teachers and others, were there other people other than teachers like administrators?

Adaeze Okorie: Do you want to share... yeah.

Grace Landry: Yeah. So, when we had... would be helpful, they gave, too, some context of how we shifted because when I had wrote that petition, I had this mindset of, "If we change the state standards, then we'll change all of history education," but I guess we were able to because of the amount of people that are active on social media at the time. We got connected with a lot of people very organically but very quickly.

Grace Landry: And so, we want to talk to people who would be impacted by teaching the curriculum and learn about their experiences. And so, once we talked to teachers, we realize that the trickle-down effect of the state standards doesn't really reach the classrooms in the way that originally had thought. And so, we had to pivot because we recognize that districts adopt the state's standards but then also teachers then have another layer of flexibility within what they actually teach in the classroom.

Grace Landry: And we also recognize that if curriculum was changed but teachers haven't done the personal work, then that could almost do more harm than anything. And so, it's the cycle of like we want to... the curriculum does need to change, there needs to be the administrative support to adopt that. But then, also, there needs to be the personal work done by the teachers that allows them to be able to teach this.

Grace Landry: And so, those conversations shifted the focus and also allowed us to realize that our role as students brings out a different lens than people who necessarily are creating curriculum or teaching, but that we could connect to current students or people who are recent graduates like ourselves and relate to that experience and speak to that more than people who are creating the curriculum.

Grace Landry: So, we shifted that focus then and also the name changed from, as Daeze mentioned, we started out as New Hampshire Education Reform Initiative. We

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recognized the need to call out racism and anti-racism as our focus, to not have that be something that was lost in what we were trying to highlight in our work.

Craig Andrade: Got it. So, we're all including our audience members' understanding and being on the same page around what you mean, describe whitewashing education. Is that the term you used?

Grace Landry: Yes, do you want... I can speak or Daeze if you want to speak to this?

Adaeze Okorie: I'll speak and then you can feel free to hop in. So, the way that I can conceptualize this idea of whitewashing, I connect it to Chimamanda Ngozi's TED Talk where she talks about the danger of a single story. And so, we understand in the United States that White people have been historically that group that has been in power and that has derailed and kept other communities of color, women, other gender identities, sexualities, et cetera, minority people at back in order for them to advance and maintain their power.

Adaeze Okorie: And so, with Chimamanda Ngozi's TED Talk, she talks about this danger of a single story where looking at history from a singular lens puts us in a very detrimental position to think that that is the entire truth. And so, we ended up losing the voices of everybody that actually makes up the full history of the United States.

Adaeze Okorie: And so, that's, personally, my own personal connection is seeing that whitewashing is a singular perspective rather than the collective experiences of many different identities and people who have contributed to the building, the sustaining, the advancement of this nation since the beginning.

Craig Andrade: Thank you. Go ahead, Grace.

Grace Landry: I would also say something to Daeze as you're mentioning that, something I was remembering was in my English class that when I had referenced in the beginning of my college experience, my teacher talked about how when referencing, then this was the first time I had ever realized this was when he was saying, for example if there's a graph that said, "American men and woman," it didn't break down, and it was typically referencing White women.

Grace Landry: And then, if you broke that down further, the difference in... I think the chart we were looking at in that point was in... and so, comparing that White women compared to Black women. And that was something that I felt like when I think of whitewashed education, I didn't understand the disparities that existed because my education was solely focused on the White person's experience.

Grace Landry: And I think something that isn't necessarily comes out of whitewashed education but might not be solely just in whitewashed education, it's also the disconnect between the history and the present. And I feel like the way that our

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education presented, what's happening today and the way that I was taught about history was very much as, "Racism is a thing of the past. We're here. That's fixed, that's no longer an issue." And so, I think that was something that I saw and Daeze and I have talked about was real problem with the way our education presented the history of our country.

Craig Andrade: So, can you say a little bit more about the detail of what are the elements that partition and now NHARE as a campaign, a movement is aiming to do? Are there specific things that you want changed or enacted?

Adaeze Okorie: I can start. So, speaking to what Grace has already named in terms of the lack of, I think, the critical thinking skill that is bred in the classroom from a young age from that K through 12 Education, that is very much, I'd say, our hope is bringing that back into the classroom, the critical thinking lens to look at history holistically because of the intersectionality and the many different peoples that make up the United States' history.

Adaeze Okorie: And, Craig, when I was watching that panel that you did recently on critical race theory, I was really just reflecting on how unfortunate and such a disservice it is to remove the ability to think critically in the classroom because of how it robs us to be informed citizens and take part in change-making in our communities.

Adaeze Okorie: Like, Representative John Lewis, who's now passed, he very much believed in the importance of education to make change. And one of his books that I had been reading across that bridge, he named how people need to be informed about the legislative process as well as our complete and true history in order to organize and make change for the systems in the areas and injustices that we've identified as people.

Adaeze Okorie: And without that tool, it's like we're stuck in this weird and unfortunate cycle of just repeating and repeating injustices that just are perpetuating. So, I know that that as a tool as a concept is something we hoped for in terms of policy, and it's currently we're seeing such an attack on that in terms of the legislation that's been passed with book banning and absolutely just denying the space to hold uncomfortable conversations that are rooted in diversity of any type really. And then, Grace, feel free to add others.

Grace Landry: I think, yeah, I mean you summarized a lot of that really well. And I would say, just like you were saying, the critical thinking piece of it is something that I don't think I got until I was in my college education which really pushed me to connect the dots that I never saw like the line between before. And I also think something else we notice is the connection between... oh, I totally just blanked but, yeah, I would say critical thinking but, yeah, if it comes to me, I'll say it later.

Craig Andrade: Sure. So, where are you at... what point are you at now in this campaign? Is a campaign, is that a correct frame or movement?

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- Adaeze Okorie: How would you describe it, Grace?
- Grace Landry: I would say we're actually looking to start a campaign upcoming but I guess organization, a community. A community, I would say.
- Craig Andrade: A community organization. Where are you now in NHARE's community organization?
- Grace Landry: I would say, Daeze do you want me to speak to this? I would say what we've... we're in this constant journey of shifting and adapting to what we're hearing and where the needs are. So, I would say kind of give context to the journey, in the beginning it was really just connecting with teachers and understanding their needs.
- Grace Landry: And then, that shifted to focusing on students recognizing that there is real need to empower students as schools were adapting different policies and trying to shift in... I think, especially in September 2020, there was at least more work being done to support different anti-racist policies being implemented in schools.
- Grace Landry: But since 2020, it feels like almost a shift reversing where our legislation is now preventing and, what is that like, undoing a lot of the work that was get trying to be done. And so, we see now we're shifting into more of a focus that's mobilizing young people to vote and be engaged politically because that's something that we've recognized is education especially public education is so connected to politics and the legislation.
- Grace Landry: And so, really getting young people mobilized so that we can get people in positions of power that are supporting legislation that would then enable education, anti-racist education specifically to be taught in schools rather than the policies now that are banning any, like Daeze was saying, any uncomfortable discussions. So, that's going to be our focus for especially with these upcoming elections, there's a lot of opportunities in New Hampshire to make sure we have people that are supporting this kind of work.
- Craig Andrade: So, this is particularly a countermove to mitigate the present or potential legislation around book banning, avoiding conflict in class, avoiding anything that would make people feel "guilty" for being White or things like that?
- Grace Landry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Exactly.
- Adaeze Okorie: I'd even add to that, Craig, just like... because I know personally, this has been such an impactful space to be in from the position of, at the time, an undergraduate student, recent undergraduate and now graduate student and just a young person from New Hampshire to recognize that us as a collective are such a pivotal and instrumental people to push this change forward.

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- Adaeze Okorie: And being able to rally people who are like us from the state to recognize just the urgency of this movement, the urgency of this righting the wrong that's happening. And the need to, I guess, grow in that skill to talk about it and not brush it off and think that, "Oh, it's not really a big deal."
- Adaeze Okorie: Because I know personally, I'm terrified seeing the legislation that's passing, wondering what will this mean for people, for teachers, and first future generations of kids who want to know some of the very instrumental giants in the civil rights movement, the women's rights movements for example, like just won't know those people because they weren't intentionally engaging them in the classroom. It's very daunting to me to think about that.
- Adaeze Okorie: So, just really being able to mobilize people of our age and not take for granted or miss our moment with it as well as just being able to be a space outside of that hub that is being attacked right now, the classroom for people to engage with anti-racist and just diverse education material too.
- Adaeze Okorie: I know that something that we have coming up is another... those grooming session workshop event, looking at Black women's role in World War II and the unique experience that they had because of the intersectionality that they had as not just women but Black women and not just Black people but as Black women. Yeah.
- Craig Andrade: So, can you say... I heard you, Daeze say this is resonating with people like you and you said, I heard, people like you and Grace. New Hampshire, as many people know is one of the Whitest states in the country. How has this landed in your local community, and have you heard or received feedback from anyone whether that be in social media or in-person or say a little bit more about that, Daeze?
- Adaeze Okorie: And so, when we initially re-emerged as a NHARE, one of the first things that we did was this testimonial campaign on our Instagram page to connect with people our age to hear like, "What is it that you're..." or, "Why do you feel that New Hampshire needs reform in its education system?" And a lot of people came back with very passionate responses but connected to, I know, mine and Grace's story.
- Adaeze Okorie: And I was also going to ask you a little bit about this, Craig, because I know you mentioned it before, but growing up in New Hampshire as you mentioned being over 90% White, I never had a teacher of color, period, growing up K through 12. And looking back now, a lot of students were asking, "Why is that the case?" That's not something that we should just be like, "Oh, that's the norm. That's the status quo," but challenging that.
- Adaeze Okorie: And seeing so many people talk about their experiences coming from college to see what they missed out on, now having a different lens on what it was that



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they were taught in New Hampshire and being like, "Oh, there are so many gaps," or "Why wasn't I taught this," almost feeling like they were... a wrong was done to them in terms of what they had actually received in the classroom.

Craig Andrade: Yeah. Yeah. Grace?

Grace Landry: I think, I would second everything that Daeze was saying. What was the initial question?

Craig Andrade: I mean, the idea that if... so, there are people like you that resonate with this, and I heard Daeze say that the things, the feedback you received from the queries on social media resonated with similar experiences. So, how did you... what was your experience in what you received from those queries? And then, I'd add, have you received negative feedback?

Grace Landry: Yeah. I would say also something we found even talking with the teachers and the people that we had or direct conversations with, it was almost a constant statement that everyone made was once either they moved out of New Hampshire or they went to college and then had the same experience where they had that moment of looking back.

Grace Landry: And that's something that I think is very frustrating looking at people who go through the New Hampshire education don't get that chance to get out of the state because it's hard to be like, you don't know what you don't know. I look back at myself before I went to college, and I was still me but I was such an ignorant version of myself. So, it's like I didn't know what I didn't know, but I really, at the same time, could be doing I feel horrible, not horrible, really harmful things if I never got a different perspective and got out of the state and talked to people who weren't like myself.

Grace Landry: And so, I think, yeah, that was a story that... that experience resonated with a lot of people. In terms of though negative pushback, we have been quite fortunate with, I would say majority. We haven't really had directly negative feedback or people that have been coming to us. I'm trying to think maybe one or two comments on our posts that people don't agree or don't understand what we're saying.

Grace Landry: And I think for us, it's been trying to navigate that with having people reflect on their own experiences. And I guess something that as we've approached this work, it's been rather than us trying to tell people what they need to believe and what we feel is right for them to support or to do or to think, it's trying to really inspire people to reflect inward through a lot more questioning.

Grace Landry: So, the way we've approached social media is to prompt people with a lot of questions. So, if we are sharing a story that we think is really important, we'd share that but then follow up with, "How does this resonate with your



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experience? Why do you think this is," and I think that actually has allowed us maybe to avoid some of that pushback by having people be more reflective than necessarily pushing things onto them.

Grace Landry: And I think, at least from my experience, a lot of this work has been reflective and my own self looking inward and like, "What are my experiences like? How does this counter what I originally thought," and then doing that personal work. And so, I think it's not just about pushing out and regurgitating a statement. So, I think maybe that's been a part to why we haven't had such pushback directly.

Craig Andrade: Am I hearing correctly? You've been really encouraging that reflection, you've done that yourselves and both individually. And then, in your engagement in social media or and with communities directly in school for example, you've been encouraging and offering these questions for people to do their own self-reflection?

Grace Landry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Craig Andrade: That's a fairly radical approach. How did you come to that, Daeze?

Adaeze Okorie: I think, I'll say that for me it's just been such a pleasure working with Grace because we have had very similar mindsets in terms of approaching this. And I'm so grateful for her to have been my partner in this work to be like, if I'm reading some content or just thinking about the past experience that I've had in New Hampshire, I am being reflective about it, I'm asking myself, "Okay. What is it that I understand? What is it I don't understand?"

Adaeze Okorie: Grace is a very similar person in terms of how she approaches the work, too, so we just very much complemented each other in that approach. And so, I'll say also personally, I'm not really a combative person. So, to come out and be very like, I don't know, just coming out of the woodworks just with such an attacking voice or energy is not me. Even if I felt angry and I felt very passionate about something, I wouldn't be able to just do that with somebody. And so, I appreciate it.

Adaeze Okorie: It's not necessarily passive but a roundabout way of engaging with people instead of saying, "You're absolutely wrong," or "How can you think this," but saying like, "This is what we want to offer to you. Go and think about this for yourself, talk to your communities, talk to the people around you, to ask them what they think as well."

Adaeze Okorie: And doing that from our social media platform especially in the midst, that peak of the pandemic where so many people were home and just engaging with social media, I think, at a higher rate, it was effective because people were just so readily engaging with these questions. They were home. You didn't really

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have much to do. So, it was very much divinely timed, I think, in terms of taking that approach and meeting people where they were with these questions.

Craig Andrade: Divinely timed. That's deep right there. I have to say, we're doing this podcast and having this conversation on Zoom, so I'm looking at you both. There is a disarming nature to both of you, the calm collectiveness that you both present. It's also the obvious that we can't ignore, you are very different women with distinct backgrounds and experience and racial perspectives in a way that in itself is somewhat revolutionary as well. What do you think about what I just said, Daeze?

Adaeze Okorie: Okay. I'll start by saying it's not something that has been very much at the forefront for me. And so, other people have brought that to our attention a time since they're like, "This is radical or amazing that the two of you are doing this together and have been keeping with it for this long," and, "Praise, God." I don't know.

Adaeze Okorie: I'm not intentionally planning this out. I'm very much trying to just show up for the opportunities that present itself, and I'm so grateful for wonderful people like Grace who have come along this journey with me. But I am so encouraged that even if I'm not like it's not privy to me in the moment or it's not salient for me in the moment how this presents to other people, I'm grateful that it's having a positive impact on people to just maybe pause and think in that way. Yeah.

Craig Andrade: Grace?

Grace Landry: I would say, like Daeze mentioned, we had recently met with one of our mentors and he pointed that out to us. And so, when you said that I was like, "Oh, my gosh. That's exactly what my..." Cooke is also the person who was my teacher and then also created the documentary that will be showing and super cool person. But he pointed that out to us and it was something that, again, like Daeze, I was like, "I don't..." it just is what it is to me, but I also think that we share different perspectives on this but have very similar approaches to this work.

Grace Landry: So, we've been so fortunate I feel like in how we've been able to collaborate through this. And while we have different lived experiences, we also have very similar values and the way that we approached this work and the way we think about what we want to do and how we want to let these things happen.

Grace Landry: Daeze and I both are very much like, "The opportunities that are correct will present themselves. And then, if it feels right, we'll go forward with that," but also being reflective through the process. So, I guess, yeah, though it has just been... I don't know, it's not something that I feel like was super intentional. We just connected and it's been great.

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- Adaeze Okorie: Yeah. And I do also want to add like it's just making me think of, I believe it's Maya Angelou but her quote of, "We are more alike than we are unlike." And I think just being able to connect on the most important values that make us alike despite the differences that we shouldn't hide or we shouldn't be ashamed of or we shouldn't, I don't know, stumble over but bring those along with what it is that we have similarities on to just make this the experience it's supposed to be. Yeah.
- Grace Landry: Yeah. Sorry. I would say I would also add to something I just reflecting on was how one of our mentors, and I remember especially Daeze, I'm not sure if in the beginning of the work where one of our mentors were talking about these different groups of women that were only White women were trying to enact change in their communities but then failed to consider different perspectives.
- Grace Landry: And I think though, my mentor, when we were meeting with him was also talking about how at the same time, this work shouldn't be held on the White people, I feel like, in history have been the cause of racism. And so, it should be also on us to help undo it, and it shouldn't just be on people of color to do this work.
- Grace Landry: And so, I think that's been something as we've approached this like showing that should be a bridge, it shouldn't just be White people going out and assuming their perspective is correct but then also not putting that completely onto people of color to carry the burden of what White people in history have done.
- Grace Landry: So, I think that's something that has been a theme especially in New Hampshire is like, I think that's a challenge for New Hampshire, too, where there's such a White population but to make sure that this work is done in a way that considers multiple perspectives and partners together.
- Craig Andrade: What do your friends think of this, Daeze?
- Adaeze Okorie: Okay. I would say everything has just been positive in terms of seeing this work being pushed forward whether it's my close friends or just people that know me from the city that I grew up in, in New Hampshire. And my hope, though, is to... because I think, as we've talked about we've had a lot of intentional conversations with teachers in this work.
- Adaeze Okorie: But my hope is to have more of those spaces than it is people of our age and have our educational background, talking about the way that we show up for the work, and we bring the gifts that have been bestowed upon us to do our part because it's bigger than any one individual honestly. And so, I would just say I'm grateful that it's been positively received by those that I'm close to, those who know me, but also seeing that as we continue into 2022, I want that to be a more intentional space for NHARE.

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- Craig Andrade: Just for the audience's sake, so we make no assumptions, when you say people your age, what does that age span are you talking about?
- Adaeze Okorie: It's that like leaving high school, like high school age to undergraduate slash early college graduate age, young people is like the... yeah.
- Craig Andrade: Got it. Got it. Grace, your thoughts?
- Grace Landry: Yeah. I would also say that has been seemed very positive for my friends. They all feel strong. They support what NHARE is doing. The one thing though that I would mention that I find interesting and is a challenge I think as we're thinking about this voter in mobilizing young people is that I have a couple of friends who after public school, after high school, moved out of the state to get... I have a couple friends who have moved out to New York or have moved to Philadelphia.
- Grace Landry: And there's things where it's like, "Will I go back to New Hampshire? Because of like looking back on that experience, is that a state that I want to be in?" And I know many of my friends want to get out and permanently leave the state. And so, that's something that I think is, "How do we make New Hampshire a place that people like ourselves like me and Daeze and others and my friends," like I think about the conversations I've had, "would want to go back to?"
- Grace Landry: Because that's something that I do think is concerning when people, my friends that move out and support things like NHARE, but then because they're living elsewhere aren't going to be voting in the state. And so, they don't have a way necessarily to make that at least as voting to make change in terms of political leaders and electing people.
- Grace Landry: So, I think that's something that is we're thinking about NHARE, too, is like while people have an education, New Hampshire are impacted by and have this like maybe once they go out of the state, get a college education, or just have another experience and reflect back on what they missed, how do they then leverage that experience wherever they end up being?
- Grace Landry: Because I think this is bigger than just New Hampshire issue but at the same time not losing people because they then are moved out of the state. So, I don't really know how we're going to actually approach that, but that's something that as I think about conversations with my friends, I think that's a concern.
- Craig Andrade: Well, I mean you said it there that this is bigger than New Hampshire, excuse me, at the same time 2022 election coming up, there is significant reason to be concerned about the makeup of the not federal government and the House and the Senate.

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- Craig Andrade: And if there is interest in finding ways to, in a sense, be back some of this impulse around critical race theory and book banning and dismissing people from school committees so that they were not doing any kind of thing that make people uncomfortable or removing conflict or dictating a certain way of teaching, there is an impulse for this to grow bigger in a way that allows people to understand the importance of the 2022 election and elections to come, correct?
- Grace Landry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Craig Andrade: Yeah. How about your parents? Is anyone afraid for you given what we see in the larger media, the back and forth, the rancor of people yelling at each other in school committee meetings and things like that, Daeze?
- Adaeze Okorie: So, I would say that the fear aspect hasn't really touched us, and I'm very grateful for that. But we also are connected with people that unfortunately have had such a really daunting, scary, physically and mentally harmful and at times violent experience in this work, and I think it's based on where you're positioned in the work and the change, the movement that's happening.
- Adaeze Okorie: People who are teachers for example, their jobs have now been placed on the line. And that's a completely different position to be in than to former students of the system who are outside of the state but still staying involved. I think, it's like we're removed from a level and we've heard those stories and we just like... I know, we're so grateful for the people who are "on the ground", doing that work where it is dangerous.
- Adaeze Okorie: And then, it's like these are the thing that just really clenches my heart is these are real people but I don't know that they're seen as that when they're being attacked and hearing the stories of some of our mentors and people that we've connected to who have testified in support like live in support of or against harmful legislation. And the way that because they're so connected to it, they've been attacked and they've been threatened.
- Adaeze Okorie: And I'm just very grateful that I haven't had to and, to my knowledge, Grace hasn't had to experience that in the work that we've been doing. But it's just heartbreaking to know that our experience is not, I guess, the norm for a lot of people on the ground doing this work in New Hampshire.
- Craig Andrade: Grace, has there's been any fear in your family or your friend group or those of you doing this work that may put you in danger that they worry for you?
- Grace Landry: I would say also no. I think, the only person for Daeze and I that we've had some mentors that are just been impacted as she mentioned that are looking out for us that just say, "Be aware of these things." And I would say it's been more

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people who are mentors to us and to myself that have hinted out, "Be cautious."

Grace Landry: But at the same time, I think, as Desi said, there's a different level of caution that I feel like we take as people who don't necessarily have stake in the interactional careers right now being lost as a result of us speaking against some education policy. But, yeah, I think mostly the people around me have been supportive. My family's been very supportive. Just mentors being, "Just be cautious," to us and, "Be aware," because they themselves have seen the impacts.

Craig Andrade: So, Daeze, did you ever think that someone would introduce you as Adaeze Okorie, social activist, advocate for racial justice?

Adaeze Okorie: Uh-huh (affirmative), no. I definitely did, like I mentioned, when I DM'ed Grace on Instagram that fateful day, I'm so grateful. But I really had no clue. This has really just been a one day at a time with God being to see like, "Where are we being led, and how can we serve to the best of our ability here with what we've been given?"

Adaeze Okorie: And I'm just grateful to be here, and I am trying to steward over this well. I'll let Grace speak for herself but I know the longer like now that we're in 2022 and it's like, "Oh, we started this in 2020, and we're still here," it's like an internal pressure of like, "All right. Let's just keep the momentum, but let's..." also, we've had a lot of conversations. I'm just saying like, this is our phrase, "This is a marathon, not a sprint. So, let's pace ourselves and do this well with what's in front of us right now."

Adaeze Okorie: And it's just like I couldn't have asked for just a better and more supportive group and community and partner in this work to just still be moving along slowly but surely in the work. And so, yeah, I absolutely did not envision this for myself. And in terms of, "Oh, what's going to happen in the future," God only knows, but prayerfully we'll be ready.

Adaeze Okorie: And I'm just like, I'm so grateful that people not beyond us continue to show up. It's not just, "Oh, this one pocket." We've also talked about in this work like so many people are doing this work very effectively in their relative communities, in their towns, in their cities in New Hampshire. And our hope is for that to not be siloed but to be connected so that the work is moved forward more effectively so there's not resource doubling. And people can learn from some bright spots that exists in their neighborhoods or their neighboring towns.

Craig Andrade: Grace, social justice advocate and a racial equity warrior. What does that sound like to you?

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Grace Landry: Yeah. I mean, I second Daeze where it's like, I want to have a positive impact in this world and that's been something since I was a kid like I never always as I grew up had the values of my family has very much do work that's meaningful to you. And I think I never saw myself as someone who's going to do work that felt like I was... it felt disconnected from myself.

Grace Landry: I don't think I ever saw where NHARE is now, what we're doing, could never have predicted this, but definitely I've always feel like Daeze and I aligned on this course like doing meaningful things. And I think that's something that's been my compass is that prior to NHARE even is doing work that I feel like is contributing positively.

Grace Landry: It's just something that I feel like growing up with my family has been, and something that I think, Daeze, you've mentioned when you're talking about the story of NHARE and I feel like I want to expand on a bit, too, from earlier just remembering is when we're talking about how we approach this work is being more reflective and that's not a typical way to approach this.

Grace Landry: Something that... I was thinking about with the original English class I had and my mentor and then the way that I approach things is he actually would start our class with five minutes of meditation because he's a very spiritual person and both Daeze and I are like that. I think that's something that I don't often see, we don't often see connected is this being spiritual work and very internal.

Grace Landry: And so, I feel like because Daeze and I can both bring that lens to how we're approaching this, I think that has helped us align and then also be very intentional with the projects that we take on not honestly knowing where that's going to bring us but at least being thoughtful and taking that moment of pause to reflect on, "What are we going to do? Why are we doing it? How is this going to contribute to where we're hoping to go and what we want to do?"

Grace Landry: And I think that is something that has allowed us to continue to sustain this and make sure we're not overburdening ourselves and burning out. But, yeah, I find that that approach and thinking about my English class, just having that mindfulness, we would do five minutes meditation is such a... I thought that was a super radical way to have class. And then, we would go into discussion. And so, I think that's something that I draw on when I'm thinking about the work in NHARE.

Craig Andrade: Well, that's great to hear. I have a long years of meditative practice, and it really has served me well. And if we can get more people to meditate in the world, we might make a better world, right, with that practice in itself. We're getting close to time, there were a couple of things I wanted to ask you about. And as we spoke before we started the recording, you're welcome to ask me any questions. Do you want to say a little bit about the film that you've mentioned, Grace?



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Grace Landry: Yeah, I can mention that. So, we're going to be hosting an event at the end of March as Daeze described earlier to highlight the history of Black women in World War II and their role. That is a documentary created by my professor, mentor, and just person who I think is awesome is Gregory Cooke. And that's, I believe, it's called Invisible Warriors.

Grace Landry: And it's, yeah, it's a documentary and they're telling their stories of the women who were Rosie the Riveters is telling their stories of the work that they did and how their intersectional identities led them through how they were able to contribute but then also what their experiences were.

Grace Landry: And then, connecting that history to show the way that you were really hoping to highlight this is to show there's this whole piece of history that I feel like was left out and emphasizing that our history was not complete because that was something like the perspective of the role that Black women played in World War II was something that I never learned through my public education until really talking with Cooke.

Grace Landry: So, I think that, yeah, that's the documentary that we'll be screening with Cooke. He'll be attending and we'll be doing live Q&A which will be really neat opportunity connect with him. And he's just a really awesome person. So, yeah, he'll be there at that event for Q&A, too, which will be really neat.

Craig Andrade: That's in New Hampshire?

Grace Landry: It will be online, I think. We're figuring out exactly how we want to, I guess, if we want there to be a certain group of people like just teachers or how we want to focus that event. But yes, that is to come.

Craig Andrade: Well, I'd like to put in a plug for an invitation, if possible. Adaeze, is there anything you want to add, anything about the film?

Adaeze Okorie: Mm-mm (negative).

Craig Andrade: One other question I wanted to ask you, Daeze, if you were to ask your ancestors something, what would that be?

Adaeze Okorie: That's a great-

Craig Andrade: In the realm of all the things we've been talking about. And then, the other question, I'm saying this out loud, obviously, Grace for you to be able to respond as well, what would you say to a younger version of yourself too? So, what would you ask of your ancestor, and what might you say to a younger or older, you can pick, of yourself?

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Adaeze Okorie: That is such a powerful question. Wow. I think if I were to ask, and I'm thinking presently about my grandparents, two of them on my father's side I did not meet and then I met them on my mother's side. But I think my question to them would be like, "How do they navigate, like just showing up every day to do what they feel like they've been called to do? And how do they navigate those stuck periods?" Because I think that's something that we all face in whatever work that we're doing, whether it's self-doubt or imposter syndrome.

Adaeze Okorie: "What is it that they have been drawing strength from? And what is it that they would advise me on if they could," and history- and timeline-wise I feel like we could jump those barriers, so it wasn't like, "What do you mean you talk to people on a computer? What is that?" But just like, what is it that they would say to me, to advise me, and to just encourage me in terms of the work that I want to do and the impact that I want to have in the world? Yeah.

Craig Andrade: Do you have any sense of what they might say?

Adaeze Okorie: I know my grandfather on my mother's side, he was a very strong man of faith who grew up in the church, the Christian church, and one of his models was the fruits of honest labor. And he, I think, would just very much continue to steer me... and I don't know fully but I think I'm inclined to say that he would very much steer me towards honest, good work that connects with people and is relational.

Adaeze Okorie: And that, I think, now that I'm even just reflecting on that, it's very encouraging because I know that this work has been exactly that relational especially in its nature because we've had to just meet people where they are and talk to them. And it's very, yeah, just it's not disconnected.

Adaeze Okorie: I have to face you as a human being, you have to face me as a human being and now we have to talk about something that's maybe difficult. But, yeah, just being able to center that humaneness in this I think is something he might say of my way, but I don't know fully what else he would say.

Craig Andrade: I'll pause the other question, and I'll ask Grace this next question then come back to you. So, Grace, if you were to ask your ancestor, what would you ask and who might that be? What do you think that they might say?

Grace Landry: I feel like it's so hard. Daeze, you had such a beautiful question. And so, I will say, I'll say my original one, but then Daeze said hers, I'm like, "Oh, mine isn't that good." I was like, "Oh, no." My original thought I was like thinking in the context of NHARE. I feel like... oh, I know the person I would want to talk to and I think would have amazing stories is so my great-grandmother lived to 97.

Grace Landry: She lived just beautifully full life up until her last year, and she just was an incredibly hardworking woman. And she was one of those people that even

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when she's in her 90s, walk to the grocery store and would do her walks every day. And she was always so active involved in community, and her family was so important.

Grace Landry: And so, I'm like, I know I'd ask her a question because I think she just has a wealth of knowledge. But I wasn't originally... okay, mine is not deep meaningful question. It was like, "What is your role, and how do you contribute to this society?" Or, "What's your position in this system?"

Grace Landry: And I think the reason I was thinking that is because I feel like I've shifted in... I feel like my idea of like, "What is my purpose, and how am I contributing to this world as a singular individual," is constantly changing and what I want and what I value is always... especially going through college, I feel like what I came in school and where I am now is so different. And it's constantly changing.

Grace Landry: But I guess maybe that as someone that she's lived this incredibly long life and has definitely has lots of wisdom is, I guess, what are her values and, yeah, how she sees herself contributing to the society. Because I look at her and be like, "She was amazing woman." But, yeah, how does she see her value? I don't know. I don't know. Maybe that would be my question.

Craig Andrade: That's a pretty good one.

Grace Landry: Okay. I don't know.

Craig Andrade: Daeze, if you could talk to your younger self or your older self, you choose, what advice would you offer?

Adaeze Okorie: I think, I would talk to my younger self because I know she exists, and I know that there are a lot of things that I, growing up, especially as a Black woman in New Hampshire, that internalized racism and just not having a good or value self-love of who I am. It would very much pile on there at certain times of my life growing up.

Adaeze Okorie: And so, I think I would go back just to comfort myself and give myself hope like, "You're going to be okay," because that is something that I am grateful like God has really been faithful in terms of just bringing me through a lot of things. But being able to go back and tell that directly to myself would have been just a powerful experience.

Adaeze Okorie: But I do know, recently, a friend of mine had given me this task of now writing future letters to myself or recording future messages to myself which I've been doing more recently. And looking back of things that I've recorded from college, it's like, "Wow." I am so glad that I'm able to see where I was and where I am now, like it's just very encouraging thing.

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- Adaeze Okorie: But I think I would go back to myself to just encourage myself like, "You are enough. You're going to be okay. God is for you." And it's like, "You're so loved too." It's so easy to feel alone especially in this generation of people, young people. The loneliness can be much.
- Craig Andrade: I can see old Aedeze saying, "Thank you." Grace, if you could go forward or back to offer something to your older or younger self, which way would you go and what would you say?
- Grace Landry: I feel like I would go to my older self. And I think I would want to see... I feel like especially so I'm a graduating senior and now been juggling with like, "What am I going to do after school? What's fulfilling? What's this nine-to-five? Is that what I want," and not knowing and then being like, "How will that all change once I'm an adult and have a family someday?"
- Grace Landry: And so, I feel like I want to go see my older self and see how did those values guide what I'm doing and where I'm at, and I'm sure it'll all work out. I'll be great. But I feel like getting some wisdom from my older self would be really helpful right now because I'm constantly so torn of like, "What will my place in this world be, and then how do I get there?" So, I think that would put me a little at ease, but also just, yeah, get the wisdom from the version of me that's old a bit.
- Craig Andrade: I really hate drawing this conversation to a close. This has been a joy. I'm grateful and appreciate both of you. Is there any final... anything last you want to say to the listening audience about NHARE and where you're going with this, Daeze?
- Adaeze Okorie: Just thank you to everybody from the bottom of our hearts for those who have come along with us in this journey and contributed to us like getting to where we are and also the people doing the work that they are in their communities. People who have decided to show up, thank you for showing up to those people.
- Craig Andrade: Grace?
- Grace Landry: I would just echo that and say, "Yeah, it's been it's truly this is not a one person, a one organization, a one district. It is all of us working together." And so, I think being able to lean on the probably people we've connected with has been amazing.
- Grace Landry: And I also think, too, just that reminder Daeze said this quote earlier, it really is one of our mantras like, "It's a marathon, not a sprint." So, I think just being in this and being remaining committed and even if you get derailed, being willing to come back. And so, I think that's been our mantra but I think would be my last closing thing for NHARE.

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Craig Andrade: Well, wonderful. Thank you both. I am grateful for the work and way you've stepped forward in a breach where there are challenges that many people have gone and looked to ignore, turn away from, you've turned towards it and turned towards it with a level of grace and mindfulness that is approvable in all kinds of ways. I wish you the best. I look forward to hearing about the film that you're speaking about. And thank you for all that you are and all that you do. I wish you all the very best, and best wishes with NHARE.

Adaeze Okorie: Thank you so much.

Grace Landry: Thank you.