

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Ashlee Marie Preston

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to "Getting Curious." I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week, I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by the activist and founder of YouAreEssential Ashlee Marie Preston, where I ask her: "Am I A Self-Karen?" Welcome to "Getting Curious." I'm so excited to officially welcome Ashlee Marie Preston for our first like, like, I'll hold up air quotes and say "official" "Getting Curious" episode.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:00:29] Yes is happening. It's happening.

**JVN** [00:00:32] We, I got to meet you for, initially from doing the New York City Pride event that you had so graciously invited me to be a part of. And that was when we first got to kind of really connect in real life. And since then, I've just been continually blown away by your brilliance and your activism. And you know, just who you are. And so really, when I wanted to have you on, on the episode, it was like my first question was, "What do you want to talk about, Ashlee Marie Preston?" Until we had that live, when I learned about the nonprofit industrial complex, I'd never heard of it until you told me.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:01:10] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:01:10] Well, first of all, welcome.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:01:11] Thank you. Thank you. Yeah. The nonprofit industrial complex is one of those rare discussed topics because a lot of people really don't know what it is. And more importantly, they don't know how it impacts them directly. And so the nonprofit industrial complex, much like the prison industrial complex, is, is an institution that essentially markets and monetizes on people's misfortunes. The nonprofit industrial complex describes an institution that monetizes on the misfortunes of the most impoverished in our nation. A lot of people don't know that it is actually estimated over a trillion dollar active economic opportunity globally. And it's one of the largest economies in the world. And so the nonprofit industrial complex's actual purpose is to add legitimacy to capitalism. So think about it like this. I carjack you and then I come across you on the street and I offer to buy you an Uber and send you home, even though I'm the one who carjacked you. I'm going to get you an Uber so that you can definitely know that there is still goodwill that exists in the world. Meanwhile, I'm the one who actually committed the offense. So the nonprofit industrial complex, one of its purposes, is to again add legitimacy and credibility to these systems that are directly responsible for disenfranchising historically marginalized communities.

**JVN** [00:02:53] So one thing I heard you say is, is it's a global industry. So the idea of, of a, of a, of the industrial, of the nonprofit industrial complex is, it's an international problem, like we have the issue here. But it's also not unique to the United States.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:03:07] Right. That's correct.

**JVN** [00:03:09] Not that it makes it OK.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:03:10] Yeah. Well, just like corporations aren't solely planted in the United States. There's business that takes place overseas. A lot of it is about global power and how we sustain global power. Right? And so I know that we currently see this is under the Trump administration, where you see him choosing not to all of these dictators all around the world and the Kremlin and, so this administration has actually let transparency to the idea that power is global and it's not necessarily an American institution, but it's global. And so what we also know is that in various countries, there is high surveillance. And so the American version of high surveillance, believe it or not, is not always the CIA or the FBI. It's the nonprofit industrial complex, because it's meant to derail mass movements. It's meant to keep an eye on what the political thought or social movement is of the day, it's meant to keep tabs on how we're organizing and it's meant to exhaust the efforts of community activists and leaders.

And so basically, my first introduction to the nonprofit industrial complex was when I came off of the streets, I was homeless. I engaged in survival sex work, I was on drugs, all of those things, because of the conditions that structural and systemic violence had created for me.

And so I was happy that I was one of the ones who didn't go to jail or prison. I was happy that I was one of the Black trans women who weren't murdered. I was happy that I still had a bright future ahead of me. And so I wanted to give back. Like most people do. And so I started volunteering. And then eventually I ended up getting a job at one of the largest LGBTQ organizations in L.A. And so got the job. And the first thing that I noticed right off the bat was that leadership didn't reflect the demographic we served. So in many cases, I was only one paycheck away from being in the same predicament as the demographic that I serve, which means I had no real power as an activist, organizer community leader to actually shift the social ecology around how we talk about these issues and how we show up for the demographic that we were serving.

And so I also had become a union steward at that time. Because, you know, she's loudest girl in the room. So I'm the loudest girl in the room. And so my coworkers are like, yes, like

we want her to defend us, we want her, and watching the ways in which they use corporate policy and rules and all of these things that they created to eventually fire me in the union, believe it or not, did not protect me. And so I think that there is this large conversation that we have to have around the idea that, again, when you're talking about an institution that relies on federal funding, it's important to remember that we can't fix the problem with the problem. And in reality, a lot of these corporations and companies, they create these philanthropic arms, not only as a tax shelter in many cases, but they also do it as a means of diverting public moneys. So that's the other thing is that when there's this federal funding that's supposed to go directly to these organizations, they hardly ever fund grassroots organizations, which are the smaller, smaller, smaller organizations that maybe only operate under a million dollars, and sometimes they even operate under 500,000 dollars, but they're forced to get creative in their solutions to addressing homelessness, to addressing mass incarceration, to addressing food or housing and security, to addressing the needs of immigrants and people seeking asylum, refugees, to addressing intimate partner violence, to addressing rape culture, to addressing the gap in educational access. All of those things that continue to keep systems of power pumping and going strong.

**JVN** [00:07:39] So if, so, whatever it is, whatever you're, you know, the most passion about, that you want to get involved, you want to help. You're one of those people who often, you realize about something you want to help. And whether it's mass incarceration or it's racial equality or it's police brutality or it's housing, education, whatever it is. But it's also the thing is, like, and I think I've been guilty of this, is like, you know, something happens. You're like, whether it's an earthquake in Haiti or whether it's, you know, something here in the United States, you want to donate and then you want to be like, well, you know, "I donated, honey, today." I'll do something again tomorrow. But like, my work is air quote "done." Well, activism isn't easy and you're not going to be able to just make a little donation and be like, "Fixed it, like I did my part." There's a, there's.

So if you're, if you're going to choose to do your activism from a donation space, which is what I'm kind of learning more, is like, what is this capitalism, honey, what's her story? Well, like what? Like what's this whole deal? It's like, but, you know, you, you don't want to accidentally enable a system that is helping to keep people oppressed. And if someone is on some board that's getting paid like, you know, five million a year or six million a year, yet, and those very same communities, trans people are dying. We're not getting medication where we need to get medication to. We're not really dealing with stigmas that we really need to be dealing with. And so I'm not saying that there's like malign intent from certain, from, from organizations. But I'm, I guess I'm just saying like, we need to be, we need to think more. Like as much as you would research the bag, what bag you're going to buy. How well does that bag hold up? You need to be giving that same scrutiny to those causes that you're trying to support. Is that accurate?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:09:22] That's very accurate. And I think that the other piece of understanding, just delving into it a little bit deeper, that it's not to say that people who work for nonprofits, the people who dedicate their time and their passion and their research and their efforts to these organizations are necessarily intentionally or actively trying to uphold capitalism or systems of power. The thing is that many of us don't know how they work because we're only allowed to see past a certain point because there's a, you know, behind the veil, you know, up in the C-suite, that's where all the action goes down.

And so the thing is that I want to be very clear that this isn't about the intention of the people who work within these institutions. This is about the intentions of the federal government. And as I said, nonprofits are typically meant to, they're meant to be a part of surveillance and to derail mass movements because there's two different types of groups. So you have political society and civil society. So civil society is these institutions and social groups that give you a sense of consent to agree to how you function and operate in society. So nonprofit organizations, social groups, campaigns, those are considered civil society. And then you have political society, which is the courts, the prison industrial complex, the police, you know, law enforcement legislation. All of those things are political society.

**JVN** [00:11:00] Corporations?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:11:10] Well, corporations are part of civil society because, again, they're kind of like, "Yay, like we're going to do this amazing thing and we're going to all post this photo and do hashtag, you know, GoodPeopleUnited. And then we're going to just, like, go from there and then yay, so y'all can put those picket signs down. You don't have to protest. You don't have to. Let's just do things peacefully. Let's be, let's go for civility." That's an example.

**JVN** [00:11:44] So it's like the toxic relationship between the two is the issue. It's like when-.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:11:49] Good cop, bad cop.

**JVN** [00:11:49] It's the-.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:11:50] It's good cop, bad cop. So civil. So civil society is good cop. Political society is bad cop. And the federal government always wants to try to monitor, control, and keep tabs on things from civil because it makes people think that

they're, that they're doing a good thing like what you said. Like it makes people, it satisfies their need.

**JVN** [00:12:12] That's what I want to break down. The federal government's surveillance through these nonprofit industrial complexes and how those are really meant to divert inner, divert funds and like, and subvert. How does that work? Like what does that look like?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:12:27] Because they place stipulations. They place stipulations on the money. That's what that looks like. So.

**JVN** [00:12:33] So what's the money mean? So how's the federal government?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:12:36] So the money means operations. So money means operations. Money means your ability to provide healthcare or benefits. The money is how you pay your workers. In many cases, it's how, you have a CEO that makes over 725,000 dollars a year. I'll let you all Google and catch that shade. There is, you know, there are folks out here, again, who are misappropriating funds and not really putting those resources and moneys where they belong the most. And so what the government does is by placing stipulations and regulations on federal funding, you then have to meet these requirements. And those requirements are set up in a way that prevent you from really being able to do anything out from under their purview. So you can't, like, prime example even, the people who have these jobs, basically, they're often required to go to school to learn nonprofit management. So basically, the professionalization of the nonprofit industrial complex is really training nonprofits how to run as capitalist machines or machines of capitalism. And that's the piece that people aren't thinking about. And so many times the people who directly im-, who directly experience those forms of oppression, they don't even qualify to do the work, although they're the ones who are directly coming up with the solutions.

And so going back to what I was saying about not really being brought into positions of leadership, but being kept on the front lines in these low paying, low wage positions, where you're wearing three and four hats, it's meant to exhaust your energy and bandwidth and resources so that on the bigger picture, they can still continue to do the things that they've always been doing. And so there's a book, that I, I recommend people reading, and it's called, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," and they break down all of these different layers of what it means to control movements through funding, what it means to encourage private foundations where they can divest public moneys into these entities that pretty much create their own stipulations, independent of the federal government, even. And also kind of breaking down the importance of grassroots.

So I actually launched a nonprofit organization not long ago called "YouAreEssential," back in March when the Covid pandemic kicked off. And the reason why I launched that nonprofit organization, but grassroots nonprofit organization is because I realized that the most vulnerable people are doing the most vulnerable work. So it's not these large corporations that function, you know, like companies, these big companies. It's actually these community collectives. And the issue is not that they don't have the solutions or that they're not doing the work. The issue is that they don't have the funding and that the donors who can really make a difference in these movements will never see their faces, will never hear their names, would not begin to even know where to look at because that's what was intended. And so my job as someone who has a platform, as someone who's in media and entertainment and has very influential friends and thinking about how can I divert that attention and that focus and those moneys, how can we get it in the hands of the people who are truly inspired and empowered by the mission? And they're out here changing the world. And so.

**JVN** [00:16:36] I have like 75,000 questions about everything that you said, I want to hear so much more about "YouAreEssential" because I'm obsessed with it. We're going to take a really quick break and then we'll be right back with more Ashlee Marie Preston after this.

"Getting Curious" has been recording remotely during the pandemic. Sometimes, that's reflected in the audio quality. That's the case with the next 20 minutes or so of this interview. What Ashlee Marie is saying is really important, though, so we'd encourage you to listen through the next segment. The audio quality switches back after the second ad break.

So welcome back to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. We have Ashlee Marie Preston. I was just writing down, as you were telling us, some of the things that I wanted to ask about. So one thing that I'm so, divest public money. That, divest means take money out of, honey. We're trying to divest from the police right now. But, but the words that came after, I didn't like as much as divest from the police, 'cause divest public money isn't what, you know think is what would be attached to, you know, a not-, a nonprofit organization that's trying to help people. So one thing that I am curious about is, you know, we, like for our lives like we had Bush 2 for a while, then we had Obama. Now, obviously, we have 45. So what? When you say that, like it's trying to divest public money. Divesting. So what are some of the stipulations that, like the federal government would put on a nonprofit organization in order for them to get these grants and get these federal moneys?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:18:08] One is, like I said, weaponizing academia. To basically, we know that Black and brown folks, especially from poor Black communities, don't have access to higher learning at the same rates as others do. And so by requiring that you have a master's or, like, a bachelor's degree or all of these stipulations that they put in place, it means that they are sustaining the chasm between privilege and the impoverished. And so in that sense, even, they're speaking two different languages, like even people who have really good intentions and they really want to do good things in the world. They're still coming from this myopic place that can't see the full depth of what it's like to be a person of color, of what it's like to be someone who's been homeless, or for what it's like, most of the people who are in these executive positions have never had these experiences. And so, in a sense, these are the same people that will call for civility, that will shun protests, that will say that, "You know, there's a better way to do it, JVN, like you don't have to resort to this," so essentially, they're agents of capitalism.

And I have to, again, tie it back to capitalism because they are by professionalizing the nonprofit sector, what you're doing is trying to get it to operate the same way companies, or basically people who are bought and paid for. And so by incentivizing nonprofits, even the idea of mandated reporter, you know, for those who don't know what mandated reporter is for people who are a nonprofit, when they hire us, we have to sign this document saying that if we feel that someone is a danger or like a harm to themselves or, you know, we have to call the authorities and call the institution and it's not to say that there shouldn't be intervention, right? What it is, is that the intervenor, or those who are intervening, are the actual systems that created the conditions. And it's meant to specifically single out and target Black and brown families, poor families, immigrant families. It's meant to break those families apart, kids are caught up in the system, it's all of these things are a part of maintaining power.

**JVN** [00:20:44] A good way that I can think of it, that I learned from Alexis McGill Johnson, who is now the president of Planned Parenthood. But she was explaining it to me as like, so like Title 10 was a grant that the federal government had, it's literally been given to Planned Parenthood in a non, in a bipartisan, nonpartisan way for like 50 plus years. And Title 10 money is actually money that I used to get HIV tested back in late 2012 in Missouri, because one of the only places where you can get an STI / STD test in St. Louis was at the Planned Parenthood. And yearly this Title 10 or maybe it was called the-, no, it's Title 10. This Title 10, granted all this money for Planned Parenthood to be able to give STI testing, abortion services, and basically the Trump administration said to Planned Parenthood, if you mentioned the word "abortion," if you mentioned the word "trans," if you mentioned the word "LGBTQ" stuff, you won't be eligible for this money. And so Planned Parenthood was basically, like, we have to be able to advise on abortion. We have to be able to advise

on trans stuff, have to be able to advise on HIV stuff so we don't want your money. So they basically were forced to turn to being public, publicly funded.

But that was like, that type, that program alone gave 700,000 HIV tests a year. And to me, like, I mean that, and that's not even enough. Like, that's not close to enough to, like, get ahead of the HIV epidemic that we're in, because we still have a testing issue. But to lose that much, at the hands of, like so that's just like one example. But that is, and that's just one organization. And, you know, and no one's perfect. And I think that so many people are trying to do their best, but I think that that is such a good, or it's such an important thing.

It's, like, so in your experience of being in, just knowing about this world, have you seen any nonprofits that are like bigger ones, like do it right? Like where you've seen, where they've heard that criticism and been like, you know what, we do need to have more people in leadership. We do need to have more people on the board, like how can we be more reflective? And I guess also my question is, if someone does want to get involved, how can they vet institutions better so that they're not just clicking and being like, "OK, well, I did it. I don't have to worry about that anymore." It's like. And then also one more question. I'm so sorry, but I want you to be able to talk without me interrupting.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:23:00] I'm not going anywhere.

**JVN** [00:23:00] So my other question is, this is like I worked with the RSPCA in Australia when I was there earlier this year over the wildfires. And there was a lot of like and they have this business model of like, you know, for however many donations they get. I think it's like they just, 10 percent of it goes to their budget, which is like paying their staff, keeping the lights on, making copies, running this there, doing this thing, like buying the cages for the things and do, like, it's like because RSPCA is for like the animals. It's like the, it's like the animal, it's kind of like our ASPCA, I think. But, like, there was a lot of feedback that was like, you know, they're like, because if you take in 10 million dollars all of a sudden because of wildfires, but you normally you'd taken like a 100,000. Right? That, the salary for those people where that's going. All of a sudden, like so that kind of it's, it's a kind of what I feel like, it's a little bit of what you're saying is like all of a sudden those people got like a huge increase in their pay, off of this huge natural disaster.

And as some of these people are already like kragillionaires for running this. And but see, I also think that that's kind of more nuanced, and it's Australia, because, like, I guess I'm just saying like, doesn't it cost money to run a thing? But if like, but then should there be a rule where it's like all of a sudden if, if your donations spike to like 20 billion dollars or 20



million dollars, 'cause there are some disaster, like should there be like a cap on salaries? Like what? Like, I think that's all my questions.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:24:34] Yes. I don't know where to start, but I'll say this. Poverty pays, just not the people who are directly impacted by it. And so I think that there, there was even a research done recently that shows that philanthropy, for every 100 dollars of philanthropy money, only 3 cents is going to the LGBTQ community. And of those 3 cents, 0.02 percent or something like that goes to the trans community. OK? So that just shows you how there's even biases, these systems of sexism, racism, you know, transphobia, xenophobia, all of those things, they still exist even in the nonprofit sector.

And so I think that in addition to making money off of people's misfortune, the goal of the nonprofit industrial complex, again, is to be the government's eyes, which is why the minute Planned Parenthood went rogue and said "No, what do you mean? We're actually here to talk about HIV. We're here to talk about, you know, trans identity and to talk about reproductive rights and to talk about," they reminded them really fast of who they were. And so there definitely is expenses associated with this. But the truth is that, again, grassroots organizations with well under a million dollars, even under 500,000, have made more impact, than these multi-million dollar organizations have. They, they can see more impact in a year, than some of them have seen in 10 years.

And it's because think about it, what would happen if we actually solved the housing crisis for nonprofits? What would that mean for them? What would that mean if we were able to get everybody fed and get everyone insured? And what would it mean if people had access to, you know, a competent mental health services? And what would it mean if these communities weren't caught up in the throes of the prison industrial complex? And what would it mean if we were doing community accountability? And what would it, they wouldn't be able to keep their lights on. What do you think they're going to do? Go open up a yoga retreat? Somewhere like in the desert? No. There's. It's a system and it's a system that's meant to consistently market and monetize people's misfortune. Like I have to keep saying that over and over because a lot of people really think.

But you asked another question somewhere in there that was around for like, what do you do? So how do you know? And every single time. Listen to these movements on the ground. Listen to the Black Lives Matter organization. Listen to, you know, organizations that that work directly with refugees and that work directly with immigrants and that work directly, trans led organizations or organizations that basically you would have to go past the first two pages of your Google search. Those are the people you want to look at, because those are the ones who are not only directly part of those communities who are impacted by those disproportionate realities, but they're also the communities that aren't

owned by the government. Their voices aren't owned. And so. And in fact, we know that when these communities exist, now the Trump administration is classifying them as terrorist organizations. Now they're coming up with new language like ANTIFA and all this other stuff, you know, so that they can play into the fear of these donors, because now donors and people who want to be, and volunteers, right?

'Cause you don't have to have money to make a difference, honey, trust me. Like I started out not having money, and just being like I got hands and feet. Where you all need me at? I got ears. Who you need me to listen to? Who do-? I have a mouth. Who do you need me to call? Who do you? Both are the ways that you do that. But these social movements are so crucial to the societal advancement that we're trying to achieve right now because they are doing more groundwork that the government cannot derail and they can't monitor it. And so these organizations that are being classified as terrorists and all that, that's intentional because they know that these privileged folks who maybe came from an Ivy League university. Maybe they've only lived in that same community in Connecticut for the last 10 years. Or maybe they, they don't have access.

And it taps into their own internal biases that they even have around these communities like there's this part that's like, I really want to help people, but deep down, helping us also means interrogating your own, your own internalized racism. It means interrogating your own transphobia, your own classism and elitism, and those that you have about why people are homeless and why they need help. And once you start looking at these systems and the ways that these systems have been directly responsible for creating those conditions, then you understand that the people who are advising you are not your friends. The people who are handling your money are not your friend.

These are people who are protecting the assets and the interests of the government, which is essentially even what capitalism, law enforcement, police brutality is all about. Capitalism is an extension of slavery and exploitation. And those people who made a killing off of exploiting Black bodies and, you know, and made all this money drenched in indigenous blood, they became corporations. Those corporations influence politics. Those politics, you know, put leaders in office who then, you know, pop out all this legislation and all these rules and all of this stuff that's done in the shadows and in the dead of the night. You know what I mean? All of that is connected. So just understanding that the nonprofit industrial complex is this symbiotic way of tying in government and politics and social movements and corporations like it's all connected and they aren't independent of one or other.

**JVN** [00:31:22] So I think what's so important for people listening this, listening to this is to really realize that like these issues, none of them are easy and none of them are, like, they're just not easy. And so, you know, one of the questions I asked is like, well, how do

you vet an organization? Like how do you see if this organization is worth your time? Is it worth your money? And it's like, you know, I heard you say that one bit about like you're going to have to go a little bit farther than the Google pages. Like one organization I found through Instagram that I like is called "Border Angels." And they're people, like I think they have like 30,000 followers on Instagram, but they're like out every single day, like, giving water to people, like and they'll, like they will do these press releases on their Instagram where, like, if someone in their echelon, like they find out was up to something, they'll be like, they don't work here anymore. And this is why. But it's like grassroots and community. It can be messy. It can be difficult. It can. And but that doesn't, that doesn't mean that, you know, not to do it.

It's like there are good people that, there are people in there that are, there are "YouAreEssential" orgs, there are people that are like you and that are making their own thing and are, and even if they aren't making their own thing, I know there's, I won't say the company right here, 'cause I don't want to put them on blast, but there is this company that came to me last year for this LGBTQ, like, diversity hair campaign. And it was for Pride of this year. And I was like, first of all, the environmental impact of this company is like on a whole other level and like there is no amount of money that can make me put my name on this. Second of all, if you're going to make this about LGBTQ inclusivity, I'm not the one to be on the face of this. This needs to be like 7, 8, 9 people. And we need to have trans people, we need to have Black people, we need to have BIPOC people, like it's not me, like I'm not the face of this. And it was a really hard, fat chunk of change to turn down because it was, but it was the right thing to do because I wasn't going to be the tokenized person that, oh, when you buy this company like you're really making a good decision.

I guess I'm just saying that there, everyone needs to like, take up space where they are as far as like putting pressure on the right, putting pressure where they can, saying no to people where they shouldn't, and just doing the work, going the extra mile to take responsibility for like, where does my money go? Like, I want to give to people that are making the right choices, that are making difficult choices. And to me, I think Planned Parenthood, that's a big organization. I, I don't know what its tax classification is, but to me, I feel like they were like-.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:34:03] That's the reason why when people ask the question of like which organizations, you always see like a hesitancy within me, because even though this group, this president, this CEO, this whomever is in that seat of whatever organization, that doesn't mean that that's going to be the same thing come this time next year, or come-, so that's what happens is that you will have these movements that start out as one thing. Or these organizations that start out as one thing and then they become something else because they've already been branded with legitimate, you know, sentiment, then

that's how the government works their way back in. That's how, you know, capitalist, individual, you know, like that's how it happened.

And so with "YouAreEssential." I don't ever plan on making this like a large organization. All of these offices all across the country and all of this, it's like, no, my sole purpose and mission is to raise the money and to build cross-cultural collaboration that yield power for historically disenfranchised community. And funding all of it, because the thing is we need people that are just focusing on the dollars. Everybody is focusing on the service and the needs. You even have people duplicating services because it's almost like it's weird version of like, kind of like "American Idol," but like nonprofit edition or something where it's like we're all coming with similar talents, in some instances, the same exact talents. But who does it better?

And it's like, what would it look like if we just said, OK, we know that you got the dance moves, so y'all go ahead and tap dance away. We know that you got the vocals, you know, giving us Mariah. So you all go ahead and sing that note, in this way and then you. But we don't do that because again, federal funding, part of the, one of the features of a nonprofit industrial complex is to ignite the scarcity complex within these organizations so that they start competing with one another for these scraps, for bread crumbs. And so that's how, that's another way in which they disrupt these movements, is that they pit organizations against one another.

That's my thoughts on it. As far as "YouAreEssential," goes. We always want to be grassroots because of the simple fact that it's when you start becoming bigger and trying to model yourself after these organizations or after these, again, capitalistic structures of power. That's when you go wrong. But to the person who's watching, who's like, I really, like how do I know? You will always know when you follow the trail back to community. What are actually the same, who don't work for these system. That was one of the reasons why I left. My following that I have, my fanbase, my followers, my voice and self with faith. The reason why it's so revered is because I'm not bought and paid for. Like I've also had to turn away fat chunks of money on months where I didn't even know how I was going to pay my rent. But I knew that's a value in being able to look myself in the face at night and feel good about what the person I am before I go to bed or when I wake up in the morning. You can't put a price to that.

And so that is the reason why it's important to not only listen to but support and fund these activists, because most of your local activists and organizers, they're not getting what they need a lot of time. They're barely able to survive and sustain themselves. You know, even media, I've had people be like, oh yeah, you're-, I am nowhere near a millionaire. And it would because, you know, if I would have kneel down and kissed the ring of capitalism

and corporate interest and government influence, I would have been a long way away from here by now. But when you actually adhere to your values and your principle and when you continue to listen to the community, I am a public servant. Activists, organizers, community leaders, we are public servants. And so the thing is that, that idea of what support looks like is always going to evolve, just as much as the communities that we live in continue to evolve. And so, again, if you see, you know, an organization saying like, oh, yes, we're about this, but then you hear the activist saying, no, they're doing this.

You need to listen to the little people. You need to listen to the David in these conversations. Not the Goliath. You need to actually support, uplift and empower, you know, these people who are putting their bodies on the line. Their safety on the line. Because let's be very clear. We've seen this taking it, zooming out and going global. We've seen countries like Brazil where they've assassinated activists and they've like killed people. They do it in Mexico. They do it in Russia. They, they are, let me be very clear, killing people. We're still having Black men lynched in 2020, literally hanging from trees, hanging from flag poles. You can Google this. And then they're ruling it a suicide. There is no way. They're literally assassinating people, and so again if you want to make the most social impact. Take your money and your volunteer hours and your time, and your attention and your microphone and your platform and go speak to the people that are coming up with the solutions directly themselves, because they are the people that didn't have to go through Uncle Sam to access their sense of duty in liberating themselves and those who share their lived experiences.

**JVN** [00:40:20] OK, so we're going. Yes, we're gonna take a really quick break and then we're gonna be right back with more Ashlee Marie Preston after this. So, you know. It's, like, I don't want people to think of like, like "capitalism without rules is theft." That's what Elizabeth Warren has said. And because the capitalistic nature of this country, was built on the backs of literal fucking slaves and the acres and a mule thing that was like the promise like didn't happen for most people. And it was never economically feasible because all the Southern states, like, went on to penalize, like reading and voting and, like, vagrancy, which was like a way that they could throw former slaves into jail for not having a job. But then, like applying for jobs was also illegal. So basically, like slavery as we knew it back in the day, it just got, it never totally shifted because of the 13th Amendment. There's never been reparations and the systems of oppression that capitalism instituted on the part of slavery. Those are everywhere still. And so, I guess to me, it's like, is? How do we exist like, are we pushing for reparations, are we, like, well, how can capitalism ever be in a place where it's like not evil or is it? Or are we advocating for more of, like, a socialism or something?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:41:46] Well, it's one of those things where, again, who are you allowing to lead the conversation. Who are you paying to lead that conversation and who are you trusting to keep the dialog honest? And I think that that's the question. It's the same questions that we're asking in the political sphere. Right? Like with these elected officials, I, and this, you know, election, it was really interesting because the white woman from Oklahoma was the one that I thought actually understood intersectionality and had policies in place or policy ideas that would have been a form of reparations that would have given us that extra support that we needed to thrive economically, socially and heal some of those wounds that this country has continued to inflict, generation after generation. And so I think that, again, you know, and we're both in these spaces where I'm not saying all corporations are bad. I'm not saying that every one is meant to, I'm saying the ideology, the concept, the overarching idea of their existence is bad.

And so until we're able to get in there and talk about these things and for them to actually, again, think about how they're going to, you know, take accountability for the harm that they've done to communities, we're wasting our time. And the nonprofit industrial complex is a way of placing a bandaid over a bullet wound. The thing is that it's never truly been about eradicating homelessness and hunger and, you know, economic strife through the inability to gain employment and all of those things. It's been to kind of just fix a little bit of it just so we're posturing. As if we're participating in progress, but really we're helping sustain systems of power. And so the thing that I really, again, want to emphasize is that. It's not about the intention of those who are a part of these institutions. I don't blame, even some of my friends, like my personal friends that I love and adore, I know that they work for these institutions. I don't blame them for that.

But I challenge them that when you are in the room and when you are in a position where you can direct the conversation and you can't set the agenda, push back. Because, and know that in pushing back, it may mean that your security may be on the line. It may mean that you rub people the wrong way. It may mean, but then at that point, if that's it deter for you, then you need to interrogate the ways in which you've been complicit. You need to interrogate what you're really doing there in those spaces, you know, because I get it. Even when I see other trans people in those spaces. I get it. Like, I was literally only one paycheck away from being in the same demographic as, or in the same predicament as the demographic that I serve. So I understand how that goes down. But the thing is that. Again, there are so many groups and social movements. Mutual aid networks, that's one thing that we have to talk about because many people don't know that the government has never done what they were supposed to do. All this tax money. All of this. The government, in fact, if the government were truly doing what they were entrusted to do for these communities all across the country, we wouldn't even need nonprofit organizations.

These organizations, our service nonprofits are there doing jobs that the government is supposed to do and isn't. And so but mutual aid networks have always been around. It's this idea that we're collecting all the resources we can. We're pulling together. We're taking something from this pool. We're also putting something back in the pool. So it's this way of like, building cross-cultural collaboration and power that continues to liberate those who have been starved of all of these resources and so mutual aid networks, most of the time, literally 9 times out of 10, these people don't even have a fileable 1c3 status because even those statuses, they come with fees, like they come with yearly fees, they come with, you know, all of these again, you have to be able to do reports and account for this and explain this. And so all you're doing is you're telling the federal government what's going on, who's coming for their wig, what time they should get there, you know, what they will be wearing. We're literally trying to, it's, it's, it's wild. It's almost like those horror movies, like those scary movies where, like, people keep getting murdered and it's like Courtney Cox and the cop and they're like running around, trying to figure out who it is. And now all of a sudden, at the end of the movie, you found out that the actual person that was the sidekick helping look for the killer was the killer. That's what's happening.

**JVN** [00:47:33] So is it best that people try not to like, so here's like a, something I was thinking about as you were explaining that, it's like so remember how on our Instagram Live, you taught me about like don't be a Self-Karen. Which to this day, I think is still one of the best things I've ever heard. So let's say that like someone is. Like they've been doing their research. Let's say this is someone who is like come from privilege, but like, they're one of those people who we, who like, "I really do want to do the best." But like, I don't want to make fun of them. But, like, that's me. That's been me before. Like, that's people who I know that have, like, been like me. So people that are trying to do their work and they really are like not taking five minutes on it, but they like, you know, been doing research, trying to figure out how they can, like, dismantle their part in their complicity over the years. Is there like a checklist to anyone listening to this, in your experience, in your life experience, a checklist that someone should ask themselves before, like joining on to any sort of organization or give, whether it's giving their money or their time? Like what would be like your checklist? Like, is it a 501-3? Are they grassroots? Are they new? Or are they old? Like what would your checklist be?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:48:34] The checklist would typically be, how much money do they have to operate with? Like what is their annual budget look like? And of that annual budget, assess how much is going to C-, to, to executive salaries. Measure the impact and follow the dollars. I talked about this before in another one of our livestreams. That's the nonprofit industrial complex has a tendency to appropriate the oppression and struggles of Black trans women and those who were at the bottom of the societal totem pole for donor dollars that we never see. And then they'd tuck us away in their sock drawer

when they're done and save us for next, you know, fiscal season or fiscal year. That's, it happens so much and so really hold their feet to the fire about which, research and upon your findings, hold their feet to the fire about who they're advocating for. Because 9 times out of 10, we're still at the back of the line while other people are cutting for seconds and thirds. And I think that, again, it's always going to be trusting the community and looking at what are Black folks saying about this organization? Not the ones who are a part of class solidarity, because that's another whole conversation.

Zora Neale Hurston said it best, "All my skinfolk ain't kinfolk." So just because there is a Black face there or a Black friend there, this does not mean that that person necessarily has our best interests in mind. Because I even talked about this before. I think it was either with Colton Haynes or Brandon Flynn when I was talking about the definition of what it means to be a beneficiary of genocide and slavery. And I was saying that a beneficiary of genocide and slavery isn't necessarily always a white person. It's anybody who gets to lick up the crumbs that fall from white supremacy's table in exchange for their cooperation. And so you have a lot of folks out here who are puppets to the propaganda, and being mindful of, it's not just about having a Black face in the room or a trans person there or, but what's that person's story? How was that person tied into the direct community who would benefit from said impact? And also, again, asking questions about how we can simplify it, because I know that some of these organizations who operate under the nonprofit industrial complex, inflate their need so that they can pull more money to then justify these large salaries. Over 725,000 dollars.

**JVN** [00:51:36] Oooh. Because they're, like, "Well, gosh, I've got all these people I have to take care of."

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:51:41] "I got all these people."

**JVN** [00:51:41] "So of course, of course, I earn all this money because it's, we got all these people to take care of."

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:51:46] "I run an organization of over 3,000 people. I need this," but in reality, you could have did that with 300 people and you could have did it with a portion of the hours and you could have did it, given them a higher salary and still have more than enough left over. So it's, again, capitalistic greed. When you try to train a nonprofit organization to function as a corporation, you're going to get the same capitalistic greed and corporate interests driving the agenda. As you would expect.

**JVN** [00:52:27] Which kind of reminds me of fucking what Andrew Yang said about fucking 45. About how like, it's so stupid to come into government saying that you're gonna run



this government as a business because we've already seen what running shit like a business does, it, like, it's, that's the whole capitalistic thing. That's the whole like. And then that's so.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:52:46] And the people who are trying to survive. The people who are trying to survive and the people who are really like, I mean, their heart. It's not about their heart being in it. Their life is on the line. You know what I mean? Those are the people you should listen to, the people who have been discounted and excluded and censored and silenced. Those are the people. It's that little voice. You know, we talk about the voice of reason and consciousness, and often people refer to it as that nagging tiny little voice. Those tiny voices are loud when you're actually on the ground. But in many cases, the people who have the privilege and resources to make a difference, they aren't that close to the ground and no one's faulting them for that. But it's about, again, taking the initiative to go past the first several pages of your Google search.

It is about actually going on social media, following specific activists who, like, I love, you know, people like Sonya Renee Taylor and I love you, you know Indya Moore. And I love Angelica Ross and I love, you know, Kimberly Drew. And I love, just, Ericka Hart and I love like all of these. There are some of these voices, you know what I mean? I love, just Frederick Joseph. My friend, Fred. You know, there are so many amazing people who are doing this work and they're speaking truth to power and there's absolutely nothing in it for them. Even my organization, "YouAreEssential," that I've been running since March with, I have to name this, "Revolve Impact." Please check them out. Social Impact Agency. They have been my key partner and supporter. I would have not been able to run "You Are Essential." Not whatsoever. Had it not been for "Revolve Impact." Mike de la Rocha. Claudia Torres. Rhea and Afton, and the whole-

**JVN** [00:54:54] That's how we were able to donate. That's how we were able to donate our FitOn fundraiser on Instagram Live.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:54:57] Yes, because I have a fiscal sponsor. I have a fiscal sponsor. I get zero dollars for running that. And the reason and eventually we will get grants, get grants from donors personally, not from the federal government. But the point is that that's because that's what passion and purpose is about. It should be informed by the need to shift the social ecology around these issues in a way that liberates folks, not lines our pockets. And there were so many people that told me, like, "Girl, take some of that donation money for you, like you have to-." And let's be clear, white people have been doing that forever. Like a lot of these orgs and no going bats an eyelash. But again, I felt that it was important to give 100 percent of the proceeds to these organizations, these grassroots organizations all across the country, because these are the people that are

going to take us to that place that we've been fighting for, generation after generation after generation. And the government's main, their, their largest tool and weapon to derail those movements is the nonprofit industrial complex, because it drowns out the voices of those who were on the ground doing the work firsthand. That are putting their bodies and their safety and their lives on the line.

**JVN** [00:56:20] So are the, are this, are grassroots organiz-, or yeah, are the grassroots organizations, are those not 5103?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [00:56:29] They are. They are. But the thing is that end up closing down, they end up closing down even when we talk about Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, for those who are, you know, tuned in to LGBTQ history, they were the mothers of the movement of queer liberation. Their organization, STAR, it didn't even last but for a year, if even, and they had to close it down because they didn't have enough resources and support. And so that's what the government does. It creates all these rules and stipulations and regulations and policies. And so if it can't get you to sell out and take crumbs, so that you can still stay alive, then it will come at you with all these regulations and red tape and all of this bureaucracy so that it can prevent you from making change. So it is up to donors, communities, you know, volunteers, all of those people, please support your local grassroots organizations.

That's why we're so excited with "YouAreEssential" to be partnering with them, for these social impact campaigns because "Revolve Impact" and their relationships with a lot of public figures, athletes, celebrities, my personal relationships, we're trying to use other people's platforms such as yourself, you know, to be able to really pass the mic to the people who have something to say, who really should be talking. And those are the people, again, who are on the ground in the trenches doing the work. We don't need any more celebrities centering themselves, front team, you know, performing like. Oh, I'm. So, and it's like, OK. That's cute and everything. But you don't really have a horse in this race because let's be real when all this is said and done, you know, you're blond and rich and white and beautiful and all of these things and, you know, even watching celebrities sometimes be rewarded for saying the same shit that people who've been saying it and saying it with stars and wounds and bleeding from their head have been saying and they're punished and demonized and scrutinized for it.

So why is it that, you know, a beautiful blond, white woman who's famous and rich can get up and say something, can get, can get up and speak to our reality and then when one of us says it, no one cares. No one pays attention. And so the thing is that we even see the ways in which celebrity culture and media promotes the model over the message. We have to stop promoting the model over the message. We have to stop playing house and

actually clean house. We have to get to a place where we, again center the voices of the people who are out there every single day. And so the job of the federal government is to quash and shut down any attempt. You know what I mean? They will shut, and this is not a game. Like some people, they're like, oh, conspiracies. It's not a conspiracy, honey, if you do the work. If you check the CARFAX, sweetie, you will see that they've been doing this generation after generation after generation since we stepped off of the plantation. They've been doing it and it's never stopped. And it's been consistent and it's been rampant. And it's been so successful that it's poisoned the earth. It's killing the earth literally. Their, this pandemic, Covid-19. That's not a coincidence. That is the direct result of the consistent abuse and exploitation and disrespect of life and all forms. Flora and fauna.

**JVN** [01:00:20] I'm just shaking my head so hard. I mean, yeah. I just, I look at the people, I'm in Texas right now, and I look at the amount of people that follow the lead of 45 and are just not wearing masks like it's you're really literally, you know what else I think is, not to get on a soapbox, but I just really quickly. With HIV, they were so quick to make laws to throw folks with HIV in fucking jail so fast. Like by the, by the early 90s, if you didn't disclose your HIV status, even potentially, you're going to jail. Yet we have Karens running around coughing in people's faces that could give them a fucking virus that we know less about than HIV, it could fucking kill them. And these people can, you can't even, we don't want to hurt well intentioned people and put them in jail. Yet people when, when it was STIs.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:01:15] Yeah, who are sex workers.

**JVN** [01:01:16] Because of the stigma.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:01:16] Homeless sex workers.

**JVN** [01:01:17] Yeah.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:01:18] A lot of my friends who were HIV positive and they were sex workers, they were telling me that when they got arrested, they actually test them. So sex workers, they test them when they book them so that they can stack on charges on top of their crimes of survival. So these are the things that, again, when we talk about the system, the prison industrial complex, the nonprofit industrial complex, all of these systems. The goal is to demonize, criminalize, and try Black and brown people in a way that fragments their families, their communities and prevents them from accessing power. It's to widen the chasm between these, these power dynamics. Like it's to widen the distance. You know, so we're not socially distancing physically, like we're supposed to. But believe me, power is definitely distancing.

**JVN** [01:02:15] Yeah. And that's, but that's the other thing too. You were explaining how like white supremacy will eat its own young because white, white people befall this same white supremacist narrative about the crumbs. It'll do it to white people too. It just happens to Black and brown people more.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:02:31] Fat phobia, ableism, homophobia. All of that was designed to oppress other white people. And then, they just added it onto our, our tab for being Black and brown on top of it and women.

White supremacy will gobble you alive if you betray it. Elizabeth Warren betrayed white supremacy when she started talking about the systems of power and institutions that were directly oppressing Black people, Black women, Black trans folks, immigrants, all of these communities who don't fall within the lines of societal respectability. The minute you use that privilege to try to bring these people up. It's a problem. And so the thing is that the most brilliant thing they could have ever did was sacrifice their own because it is always poor white people that are the henchmen of white supremacy. It is the, just like even sometimes gay men, gay white men have allowed themselves to be the henchmen of white supremacy because what they have done is inflict pain.

Like, it's almost like walking up to someone in a store and just like slapping them in the back of the head. And then you turn around and then it's the Black or brown person or the trans person standing there and they swing at us, when in reality we're not the ones who took the shot. It was your own. You know what I mean? And so that is how white supremacy operates, is it has us here. It uses poor white people, poor gay people, poor, you know, disabled white people, white women. It will use all of those. It will create those layers of oppression solely so that it can use them as a smokescreen and a weapon of gaslighting to discredit that it's race-based. And so when in reality, it's about the 1 percent. White supremacy, what's happening in countries where it was only white people. You know, even the, the settlers, they came from, some of them, interestingly enough, were the ones who were oppressed or criminals, over there. Over in England, in, and over, and they came here and enacted the same systems of supremacy.

**JVN** [01:05:05] The same shit.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:05:06] That they had experienced over there.

**JVN** [01:05:09] Yeah.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:05:09] In fact, there's even accounts of indigenous people talking about how bad they smelled. Talking about how much disease they brought over here. How much, which is just so hilarious. Because we use that language and those descriptors to dehumanize and, and, you know, shut out the humanity of homeless people and all this, but white people were that, when they came here.

**JVN** [01:05:33] Yeah.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:05:33] To this land. You know what I mean? And so.

**JVN** [01:05:37] Yeah. So, yes. And that also kind of reminds me of like when people have survived an abuse, they like it, like, I mean, this is a weird, well, I'll just say it. In the salon, like a lot of times, assistants get abused. You get paid 6 dollars an hour while your boss is getting, you know, 750, 1000 dollars an hour, like you're literally the one doing the work, like helping them maintain three and four clients at a time. And then they're going home with these checks. And you're like, I don't have any. And then, but then when the assistant works their way out of that. And then the assistant gets in that position, they will turn around and they start paying these people to, and they start abusing them the same way. And that was always my thing. When I got on the floor, I was like, I'm never gonna do this to my assistants. Like, they are going to get paid well, they're gonna get benefits, they're gonna get time off. I'm going to pay for their education like I'm like not going to do to them. And I think that is kind of, I said something in my book about like I really do think it's part of, like the human experience to try to figure out, like, how do I not replicate this abuse that I went through?

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:06:31] But that's not how we do it though.

**JVN** [01:06:32] Because there is this awful thing in our heads that makes-.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:06:33] We classify it as "paying my dues." I had to pay my dues. So now you have to pay your dues. And really what that is, is, is this unsettling realization that many of us don't want to truly dismantle white supremacy. We want to access the benefits of it. And so there is the author. You have to read her. Her name is bell hooks. And bell hooks is not one, but she often talks about the role that Black men, cis hetero Black men and white women in America, white cis gendered women have played in helping maintain white supremacy, and that those are the only two identities that only have one layer of identity separating them from full patriarchal power.

**JVN** [01:07:33] Ooh.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:07:33] So if it weren't for the fact that you were, that you were Black, you will be a cis hetero white man in America. If it wasn't for the fact that you were a woman, you would be, a cis hetero woman, you would be a hetero white man in America. And so everybody else, once you start breaking down, like the fact that if I wasn't trans, I would still be Black. You know what I mean?

**JVN** [01:08:07] Yeah.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:08:07] If. And so that's how that works. Black trans women are the last link to full liberation. We are the piece. We are the cog. The thing that keeps the, and people haven't realized it yet because we, our identities overlap with multiple marginalized groups that are experiencing similar exploitation and oppression. And so if you can actually figure out how to advocate for and support the most vulnerable among us, everyone else will benefit from it. And so the thing that, again, we have to remember what we're talking about, white supremacy, is that it is literally about protecting the interests of the top 1 percent. And even when we think about billionaire class. Think about what kind of blood you have to help spill to be, not just a billionaire, a multibillionaire.

What kind of exploitation, what kind of corruption, what kind of looking away, or turning your eyes away or what kind of, you have to sell a piece of yourself. That comes with a cost. No one can make me believe that you can be a multibillionaire and not be complicit. That you're not in the rooms with Jeffrey, the Jeffrey Epsteins and the Harvey Weinsteins and the, those are your Judys. Those are their sisters. Like those are their-. Like you can't tell me, you know. And so, again, going back to the nonprofit industrial complex and how we remedy the co-optation of social movements via nonprofit, because that's what's happening, is that the actual people on the ground who are doing these strategic movements, they're being classified as terrorist groups. They're being unable to keep their doors open or their lights on or, or even put food on their own tables at home because they're completely married to this work, while these organizations, the nonprofit industrial complex, will take bits and pieces of the truth. Water it down, you know, sanitize it, scrub it, you know, and then present it in a way that's palatable to the masses in a way that strokes their ego and their sense of like, "I did a good thing," you know, instead of realizing that when you're really doing the work, it initially doesn't feel good.

It feels messy because it interrogates the deepest parts of ourselves and the ways in which we've been complicit, consciously and subconsciously. It requires us to ask ourselves how much are we willing to put on the line? Because when you start fucking with power, let's be very clear, there is backlash. And it may not be immediate and it may not, but here's the gag. Here's the kiki behind it. The people who get the backlash are people like me.

Nine times out of 10, wealthy people, white people, all of these, you will never experience. Why do you think we always tell white allies and supporters like we want to support Black and brown folks, show up to these protests and stand, get in the way between them and law enforcement, because we've seen videos that have proven that they won't attack a white person who's standing in between a member of law enforcement and a Black person. They won't attack them, the ways that they'll attack us. They won't pull their guns and shoot the way that they will shoot us. They won't pull out their stick and beat us the way that they will beat them.

And so I think that, again, it's really asking yourself, how much are you willing to put on the line for liberation? How much are you willing to give up that part of your privilege that cushions you and protects you and siphons you off away from the experiences of historically disenfranchised folks? And when you ask yourself that question, it is going to yield a truth that is so uncomfortable. It's going to be visceral. It's going to be painful. And that is why we tell you upfront that it is so important that you divorce yourself from these notions of what it means to be a good person, because when you are able to identify the fact that it's not about your personhood and your intentions, but about the system that you were born into. You don't take it personal, but you make it your personal mission to disrupt it.

**JVN** [01:13:08] I honestly can't. There's no better, mic drop. Then that. For, to-. I mean, I really don't think there is. Unless there's anything else that you want to say. I mean I just think that's literally the most important, especially for folks that are newer to this fight, listening to this conversation, I think that's the most important thing to en-, to end on, because I think people are so fucking afraid of thinking that they're a bad person, that they just don't even have the conversation. And so there's no better way to end this conversation than what you just said. Ashlee Marie Preston, thank you so much for your time.

**ASHLEE MARIE PRESTON** [01:13:38] Thank you for having me. You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Ashlee Marie Preston. She is a speaker, activist, and the founder of YouAreEssential. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Rae Ellis, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson, with associate production by Alex Murfey.