

## **Just Eats**

### **Episode 5: Part 2: Black Canadian Food Futures**

**Courtney:** Welcome to Just Eats podcast! We're your hosts Shobhana Xavier and Courtney Szto. We're professors at Queen's University who do research around anti-racism and food. This podcast series explores food histories, futures, and sovereignty through conversations with Indigenous and racialized chefs, activists, and experts in Turtle Island or Canada. In this episode, we're talking about Black Canadian Food futures.

**Shobhana:** Today's Black foodscapes are layered and contain multitudes of genealogies, memories, palates, and cuisines. In Part One of our discussion of Black Canadian Foods, we spoke with elders Bernice and Beatrice at the historic Africville Museum, in Halifax, Nova Scotia about some of their food memories of living in Africville. In Part Two, this episode, we continue our discussion on Black Food Histories in Nova Scotia with Wendie Wilson to learn more about Black food sovereignty and food security today, and then we travel west to speak with Rochelle Ignacio about Feed the Soul YEG, an initiative that supports and amplifies Black owned restaurants in Edmonton, Alberta. Here is our conversation with Wendie Wilson at Alter Ego Cafe in Halifax.

**Wendie:** Right now I have a role with the Nova Scotia teacher's union that I took a year ago. So I'm an executive staff officer, BIPOC engagement, and advocacy. I work provincially. And then, I also, you know, have an opportunity to collaborate and work with other associations and Federations in Canada. So, our umbrella organization is the Canadian Teachers Federation. I've been able to spend a little bit of time in Ottawa as well connecting with teachers. And my master's is in Afrocentric leadership -- it's adult education, lifelong learning. So while I was teaching elementary school, primarily grades 3 to 5, I was simultaneously doing this master's that wasn't at all really connected to what I was doing. A lot of teachers do their master's on Curriculum Studies and, you know, inclusive Ed, that aligns with the work. But mine necessarily didn't align because it was adult education. So that's always kind of been the direction that I wanted to move towards is teaching adults. I get to do that now because I'm in the professional learning department with the union. So a lot of presentations and conferences and professional development, that sort of thing.

**Courtney:** So what does food mean to you Wendie?

**Wendie:** Okay, so food is everything. I really didn't think a lot about that prior to COVID. And you know, how many people found passions and were able to look deep inside and you know, introspectively find a lot of kind of who you are at the core. And what I found is that African Nova Scotian, as a person of African descent here in Nova Scotia, is my entire life I've been fighting racism. I was asked to be on a panel and talk about school food and also talk about Black food sovereignty. So I did a little bit of research. And what I noted is that food is the first fight? Like, how do you even fight racism if a person isn't well? They're not mentally intact. They're not spiritually grounded. If they're not, don't know anything about their culture, you know? If you can't even think straight because you've been consuming processed foods for the entire day and sugar, like how do you even focus, right? How do you ground yourself? And so that's when I started really getting involved in this coalition for healthy school food, which is a

Canadian initiative, but they have a chapter or board advisory in every province. And the mandate is to create a universal school food program for kids in Canada.

Someone who I really look up to, his name is Anan Lololi. He's at the African Food Basket in Toronto, and he's really, really helped lead me in this work. He says that food is our premier medicine. And so, I think about that a lot. And now I think even more about, every time I put something in my mouth, I think about how is it benefiting my body? Right. And I guess I just want other people, in particular people in my community, students that I would have taught, just to even just be aware. I don't eat a vegan diet, or, you know, I do consume sugar sometimes or white flour, but at least I have the knowledge to know what it's doing to my body. Right. And that's all I'm really interested in is creating that awareness of being able to really make a choice on what you're putting your in your body. And, more importantly, knowing where the food comes from.

We often talk about, you hear that term food insecurity/food security, and that's typically what we want to achieve, right? We want people to be food secure. But I don't think that's enough. I'm food secure. I can go to the grocery store, regardless of how much salmon is, I can choose to buy it, or I can choose to go to, you know, dine in at a nice restaurant. I can get around to the different grocery stores because I have a vehicle and I'm able-bodied. Food security doesn't really give me security, because I don't...first of all, I don't know where my food is coming from. I don't know how it got here. I don't even really know if it's safe. Right? I don't know who handled my food. I don't know what chemicals are in my food. I don't know any of that. What we are trying to achieve is food sovereignty. Putting Black and Indigenous People back in control of their food systems. And when we talk about food systems, I'm talking about everything, from how food is grown to what we used to fertilize it, to how it comes to our tables, how we prepare it. All of those pieces are important, the processing of food, how people are treated, food workers, that's all important. Most efficiently, it will be done like at a community level. While impacting community, it also needs to be sustainable. Right, so sustainable for the environment, but also economic.

We need to start spending dollars in our community. Keeping the Black dollar in the Black community, keeping Indigenous dollars in Indigenous communities. Because we all know how people are now utilizing places like food banks, right? Food does not solve food insecurity. Income. If you can't afford the food... like, how do you how do you ask people for food? Like how do you do that in a dignified way as well. Right? Do you have to like stand in the lineup for an hour outside on a public street with your kids waiting for your food, and then other people are choosing what they're gonna give you? And so I think there's a lot to be thought about that whole term food security, and I think we need to be really thinking about moving away from that. And moving toward food sovereignty.

About 37% of Black children in Canada are food insecure. And just over 50% of Indigenous children in Canada food insecure. So we quite separately need to be thinking about consulting, caucusing, individually and together and that's one thing that I've been able to do over the last year is work with some people in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement as well as some Black folks. And I'm part of, I'm on the board for Food Secure Canada. And as a result, I'm also on it's called the Indigenous and Black Food Sovereignty Circle. And we were granted some

money from Walmart Canada or Walmart Foundation to look at those different streams of sovereignty in terms of Black and Indigenous foods sovereignty. And so we came together and then we also decided, once we came together, that we really need to caucus separately and then support each other. So, we have a first gathering, God willing in August.

**Courtney:** Yeah, I think, particularly my students think about food as, just something that fuels their body. And it's like a means to an end, as opposed to everything that you said, like, "Where does the food come from? How does it actually fuel us?" Thinking of food not as a commodity, right?

**Wendie:** Right. And actually, a man that I met through this movement named Byron Beardy. Just really said something so profound, when I met him in person last year, is he said, when you're born, food is included. Right? Food is included when you're born. We made it, we made it into a commodity. We have everything we need as an animal on this planet to survive. And food's been colonized as well, like, you wouldn't put that colonial structure to where, you know, it's like three meals a day, because we have to stick that clock be at work at eight o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile, our ancestors were eating when food was available and preserving food during those scarce months. And laying low and relaxing and being in community and being with, with, you know, friends and family.

And also, when I think about food in terms of being healthy, I think about you know, how it nourishes our bodies, but also how it nourishes us spiritually, right. And when I have to go collect my food, how I connect to nature, right. Even the collection of food physically how it keeps you healthy, right? Sweating, you know, cutting down trees, find firewood connected to nature, being with family and friends. Like, I get my car, and I drive to the grocery store. I don't collect food, that can't be healthy. Like I mean, the other thing I think about quite often too, is how we eat with utensils. Right? And missing that experience of how some cultures eat with their hands. And I'm missing that whole layer.

**Shobhana:** I grew up eating my hands. And I was just telling Courtney when we met Colin yesterday is that I remember the first time like, as a child going to my friend's house, you know, white friend's house. And they would eat with the utensils and stuff. And I would just be like, fumbling? Yeah, we don't eat with our...No fork, you get the food you put on your plate. You know, it's amazing, the experience, right? You just kind of use your hands wash, your hands it's all great. And so yeah, growing up, we would never, go anywhere, I'm just always so anxious about... I just don't know how to use utensils like this... I'm fine now. I figured it out. But as a child, it was like a really weird experience.

**Wendie:** I don't think it's even the right way. Like I mean, I shouldn't say the right way. It's, I think we're missing something and you think about our favourite...like when you think about North Americans and some of our favorite foods: it's foods we eat with our hands. It's French fries, hot dogs, tacos, like things that you can actually touch, right?! It's a whole other layer of experience that we missed. And we're doing this right. Yeah. And even the number of things that you touch on it that are actually organic...I challenged myself to do this a few years back when I was working at a school thinking, because quite often I would go at recess and I take my shoes off and just like stayed on the grass or, you know, just kind of ground myself, connect to

nature. And then I thought like, how many times a day am I touching nature? And it was I remember it was on a Wednesday, and I took notes. And at the end of the day, I realized that I touched a banana. Right, like my office is, so I got a synthetic desk, I mean, it's synthetic chair, I'm wearing shoes. You know, I'm writing with a plastic pen, like really, I get in my car and nothing's organic. You know what I mean? Steering wheel, open the door keys, like...

**Courtney:** Everything is meant to create distance between you and nature.

**Wendie:** Right? Right, with the exception, if you're lucky enough to have people in your life that you can actually touch right. And other things that are living and breathing, organic, right.

**Courtney:** In our conversation with Wendie, she spoke more about her labour and activism around food security and sovereignty including recovering Black food history in Nova Scotia, particularly based on own her experience.

**Wendie:** And so growing up for me in this community. My mother actually just grew up like right around the corner, which is unusual. Most Black people that would have been my mother's age, she was born in 1933, came from rural communities in Nova Scotia. So there are over 52 Black communities in Nova Scotia, but her mother raised her here, right in the inner city. And then she like grew up just on the same street with Viola Desmond. Yeah, so she grew up in this community. Viola Desmond had a shop right here in Gottingen Street. Right? Yeah, yeah. So there's a lot of history here. But my mom was a stay-at-home mom; she was a child provider. She's looked after kids in the neighborhood. There were 6 in our family, but my mother raised 10. She raised her sibling's kids, and my father's siblings kids as well. Like if, everyone that I knew, most people that I knew had a cousin that lived with them because their parents couldn't raise them. Then the grandparents would raise them or a brother or sister or relatives would raise those kids. But in saying that my mom, she made everything from scratch. Right? She didn't...very rarely did she ever purchase anything that had like, directions, you know, put it in the oven and do this. You know, it was whole vegetables. The vegetable man came from the Annapolis Valley once a week during growing season. She you know would buy a 50-pound bag of potatoes. And my father always had a garden. He came a little community out by the airport called Old Geyser Road and his father had property there, a lot of property, and he had a big garden. And so, he farmed that garden during the growing season and then would bring the wares home, you know, or put them into cold cellar and we have a lot of root vegetables. And then there was a lot of pickled and kind of preserved meat as well. Like there was about three or four butchers in this community. So like roast beef, and the pigtails and the pig feed, and the oxtails and all those things that are super expensive now. They were really cheap. Most of the fish that we got, that we ate, never came from a supermarket. Right? The mackerel came from the harbor or wherever, and smelts those would come a couple times a year and my father would go. I just remember you know jumping in the station wagon with them, driving into the country somewhere. Handing the man a big black garbage bag and him dipping that in the water? Right going smelts cause smelts were honey so you just dip them and they were plentiful. Eels, gaspereau, mackerel was really big in this community, and rabbit right. They would snare...my father taught my brother how to snare rabbits. He never taught me probably because I was a girl, but he taught me how to prepare to the meat. So I used to help him skin the rabbits.

**Shobhana:** Oh wow.

**Wendie:** Yeah, I remember like I remember he can hold those up so just pull it down and help prepare the rabbits. Yeah, help you skin the rabbit! It was really just like pulling off a sweater...like peeling off a sweater with like some static, right? It's like little friction but...and then as kids in this neighborhood we used to...if you were really fortunate, if you were able to bring a rabbit's foot to school. The rabbit's hind leg?

**Shobhana:** Yeah

**Wendie:** That was good luck. Yeah, it was a good luck.

**Courtney:** I've heard about the keychain, but I've never heard anybody say the actual story...

**Wendie:** Yes, like score! I got a rabbit's foot I'm bringing to school though bloody bone sticking out of it.

**Shobhana:** Really?! Even with all the...

**Wendie:** Yeah, yeah, I mean you try to clean it up as much as you can, but the bone was...

**Courtney:** You need something to hold onto!

**Wendie:** Oh, yeah, that was good luck. That was good luck. So yeah, we ate from the land and those things, those last few things that I, you know, I mentioned to you like gaspereau, smelts, eels, rabbit, deer meat, those are all things that we would have learned from the Mi'kmaq people' they Kwilmu'kw people here would have taught us how to find those things, how to source those things, right. So when I think about African Nova Scotian food but I think about those things but also think about the Caribbean influences with some of the spices and jerk chicken is now part of our repertoire. And you know, curry chicken and rice and beans and then some of the other dishes that are heavily influenced in Africa-Nova Scotian food is Southern cuisine, right, the mac and cheese and the baked beans and the fish cakes and all those other pieces, corn bread. And then those things that we call maritime food. So maritime food is fish cakes and baked beans, but it's also a part of our repertoire.

And so prior to me really writing about it and talking about African-Nova Scotian food people didn't really think that it was like a legitimate cuisine. It's like "well, that's just boiled dinner, that's just maritime food. We eat that in Cape Breton and Newfoundland. But the way we make our boiled dinner would be with what you had, what the land had to offer in terms of root vegetables, cabbage, potato, but we would add pigtailed, right or curried pigtailed right. And so even with the baked beans and the salt cod fishcakes. Salt cod fishcakes, they're like, that's a maritime thing. And the way that my mother always prepared them was exactly the same way that you would have it prepared in, you know, in Cape Breton, or in Yarmouth. Just a white potato with a white onion and salt, salt cod, and some are savory, and dusted in some flour, you fry it up in a pan. But I could see that the reason why we gravitated towards some of the recipes that were in existence here is that they probably reminded us of things that we would have eaten

prior to coming to Turtle Island, or prior to coming to Nova Scotia, those things were like, Oh, that looks familiar, like, we'll gravitate to what we might not be able to get same kind of fish, get back home, but this will do. Salt cod and it's plentiful. And it's easy to store.

**Courtney:** The idea of a legitimate cuisine is also an interesting conversation, right?

**Wendie:** Well, here in Nova Scotia, like so, there's like, four historical communities, right? There's obviously the First Peoples that were here. And we have Acadian culture here as well. And we have African Nova Scotian culture. And we also have Gaelic culture here in Nova Scotia. So for us as African people in the way we came here a lot was like forgotten or left behind or stolen from us. We had to put these pieces back together. And food is one of those pieces, those very visual pieces of culture. Language is a very notable and recognizable piece of culture; we don't have a language. What would my people have spoken? But I say that we don't have a language, but we do have a language -- we have a way of communicating. That is a really a secret code. And the only way you get to be in that club is if you are part of this historical community. And being part of this historical community as an African-Nova Scotian, like that term has been put to question like put in question like: What is an African-Nova Scotian? And for me, the definition is like, very clear. Is it someone that's been here for the last 40 years, and maybe came from I don't know the Caribbean or maybe you came from stateside, you know, Boston or wherever. You have to be connected to one of the 52 historical Black communities in Canada to be African-Nova Scotian. That means you're still African-Nova Scotian, if you've never lived here, if you've never been here. Your parents were born here and you, they moved to Toronto before you were born. You're still African-Nova Scotian because you can trace your roots back to one of those communities that predated Confederation. Right, so that's who's African-Nova Scotian.

**Shobhana:** One of the things we're thinking a lot about is also like, the question around legitimacy and authenticity, but like cultural appropriation, around food as well. And so like, you're talking a lot about lineage and what connects us to this place? And who is connected to this place? But with food, it's like, also, there's this other interesting question of like, who can connect to food, and like, can people who are not part of the particular cultures, like we're eating you know a samosa, right, in a cafe in this place. So it's like, do people who are not part of those cultural backgrounds, can they make food? Does it become like a commodity? Like, can only certain people sell certain things that they have access to those cultures in a personal way? And it's a really big complicated question. And I think about this a lot. There's no easy answer. But have you thought about that?

**Wendie:** I've definitely thought about that. And it's Michael Twitty, he talks about culinary justice. Right. And just being able to recognize and give people credit, is a big thing. Especially like, in working in a university. I just don't land on a thought or a theory or even a quote that comes from somewhere, right? We need to be whenever we can give people credit for those things. So, Black people were able to, after Emancipation Proclamation, people started moving up north, right, for those factory jobs. And so what they took with them is they took the rules, right? You might not have seen restaurants, but you would have seen people open up their homes and serve meals same that, that same deal that we're doing now. You would have seen food trucks or places where you could duck in and get a meal. So, one of the other things that Michael

Twitty says is "food is your flag." So tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you where you're from. Right? It's one of the last things that people give up. I don't think they give it up. I don't think people ever give up their cultural traditional foods that they grew up with. You always looking for this food, right?!

**Courtney:** Yeah, it's a hug on the inside!

**Wendie:** Right, you're like I need that right? I can try all these other things, but it really comes down to it I really need to be eating my food. Yeah, that stuff that I grew up with, that stuff is so connected to us. That stuff that connects us to the land and that's what I find so interesting about language. We don't necessarily have a formal language, but we have a way to communicate is that language is land based. You don't, do you need a word for shark if you never seen a shark in your environment. Like do you even need that word? But you have other things in your environment and other ways of doing things and so I find that so interesting about language how it is land based, and it is connected to a place right. And it's all connected to a place, right. our culture the food our health what our body becomes used to after generation of eaten those yams, and eaten that okra from that place, and how maybe our DNA gets like, you know, altered and how we, our body know now craves and needs those foods and how we're always drawn back to that piece of land.

**Courtney:** Where Wendie has been advocating for food and community access through education in Halifax, across the country many Black food advocates and activists are working in different sectors of the food industry to address the various needs of the Black food communities, such as access into the food industry itself. One such advocate is Rochelle Ignacio and her Feed the Soul YEG initiative. We caught up with Rochelle at Lockstock Coffee in Edmonton, Alberta.

**Rochelle:** Uh so it was actually similar during the pandemic. I was uh quarantining at home and I watched *High on the Hog*, it's a good little binge watch and I thought it was really cool. It's a history...I've never been to Africa myself like my heritage is Caribbean, my parents are both from Trinidad. And so it was really interesting learning about the history and really seeing African cuisine in a different way. And I say African like very sparingly because he travelled to different parts of Africa. It was nice to see like that there was like a gastro culinary scene that you wouldn't really think of cause that's not the narratives that we get um over here. So I always had an idea, I've been working with Black entrepreneurs in Edmonton since 2020 and I've always had an idea, like no one's really highlighting food. I just didn't really have the resources. But I've been thinking about um pivoting like what I was doing and how I was amplifying businesses. So that's when I said we should do a dining week and I started kind of dropping it in people's ears. All my work is through social enterprises, so it's like volunteers that really do the like administrative operational work behind it. So, I assembled a volunteer team and we just really started hitting the streets. It was really a little bit difficult because people don't know me for food, and they're all small businesses who, as we know, the restaurant industry/hospitality industry is like hit hard by the pandemic, so they're just trying to keep their doors open and then there's a stranger knocking on their door saying like, "Hey, do you want to sign up for this new thing?" So, it took a lot of like going back to places repeatedly, emailing, phone calls, um dealing with like language barriers as well, but eventually we were able to like break through and end up with Feed the Soul.

Even through Feed the Soul, I feel like I learned about different cuisines as well so, and learning about the culture of it. So, we went to like Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants and my partner, my co-lead in Feed the Soul, that's her background, so when we took some of the food content creators on a tour, she is able to talk about the nostalgia of like smelling coffee when pouring like the traditional coffee. She was able to talk about how it's just a way to like connect and you know, end your meal and how like everything is eaten with your hands. It's in big platters and it's like serving you is like an honour. Sometimes in North America we put the food on the table and we all help ourselves, but like in her culture it's like an honour to serve someone's dish up for them. So, I found it really interesting to look at food beyond like what's on your plate in front of you, but more about you know, how does this connect, what's the heritage, what's the history? And also what's the restaurant owner's journey to Canada or journey into the restaurant scene itself.

So in 2020 I started um with a group of six community members a pop-up market called Black Owned Market. And it was about like makers and creatives. Um, this project is its own standalone project and so it's a way to support a different segment of Black entrepreneurs essentially. Um, but it's not part of the market. I actually am not doing the market anymore right now; I'm more focused on Feed the Soul. It seems like something that a dining week happens like once a year. That's how we do them in the city. And so just like where I'm at with my career and then where I can like put effort into projects, I think it makes sense to do something that people expect once a year. But we're even looking at how can we keep Feed the Soul alive beyond the weekly campaign. We're doing a Juneteenth catering for Edmonton Heritage Council. Edmonton, if you don't know, we had Oklahoma settlers who came to an area called the Amber Valley. We really have a deep history of Black settlers in Alberta. And then eventually they came to Alberta - or Edmonton as well. They were really in the Boyle Macaulay area, but there's a place called Hattie's Chicken and Diner and so what Edmonton Heritage Council is trying to do is like kind of replicate Juneteenth, try to replicate something that you would've seen on that menu. So it's interesting and really exciting to see um different areas of Edmonton really learn about Edmonton's Black community, learn about it through food and then find ways to incorporate it into like different events and keep that tradition and customs going on.

**Shobhana:** I mean one of the ways we found you online was through the Black market. We're curious about what that process was like and um how that came up a little bit more and perhaps if you feel comfortable talking about your decision to step away. I mean, is it sustaining itself at the moment still or...?

**Rochelle:** No, actually it's just in the process of like completely winding down. It was really in Calgary they announced Black owned market Calgary and we wanted to find a way to bring that to Edmonton. We just thought it was going to be a one-time project, but with the support like similar during the pandemic, there's nothing to do so people came out more than we would've imagined. But they kept asking when's the next thing? How can I collaborate? So that's when we decided to um make it into a social enterprise and keep it going. It's just been a lot of work and I feel honestly like markets are really saturated in Edmonton. I've seen a few other markets say that they just don't want to put vendors in a situation where they're not going to make money or be competing with four other markets on the same day – and so I announced that I was no longer going to be continuing that, and then I saw other people start announcing and I just found it



really interesting. It kind of validated that I made the right decision. And so it's good timing cause like as I send like Rose, that's what I've been saying. I send Rose Feed the Soul, yeah, I'm sunsetting a different chapter of my life, but I'm still doing and carrying out my work. But we also, the demographics of our city are changing. Alberta's like the third largest Black population in Canada.

**Shobhana:** Oh wow.

**Rochelle:** And so that's really shifting what we're eating as well. Edmonton, like probably a lot of cities, we have something called Heritage Days. And so there are a bunch of different food kiosks from different countries and I think that really inspires people to like try out different foods that they wouldn't normally eat. And you might not even see a restaurant that serves that cuisine all the time. So I don't know. I think we're adventurous. We love to support local and then we just have a rapidly changing demographic that allows um people to like start up a new restaurant and then it can be successful, and it can like –

I don't think we received as much pushback as we did from the Black owned market. And I think that has a lot to do with how you're branding yourself. We did, like, I don't know, it gets the trolls that we're segregating ourselves. But we just have to have like thick skin and that's not who you're serving, that's not who you're marketing to and not let that really distract you. I think even when you think about, we're looking at, oh like, should it be like Black owned dining week? Should it be like Black dining week? Then we're like, what is like Black dining? Like, there's a lot of questions when it comes into developing a name, but when you think about the Black diaspora/African diaspora, we come from so many different places like we're eating at Lox Stock right now and we're eating a lox and bagel and like BLT.

**Shobhana:** Yeah.

**Rochelle:** So just because you're Black doesn't mean you have to serve African and Caribbean food. And that's what we also really tried to do with Feed the Soul. So we had a caterer, like a, she has a kitchen, but she does like large scale catering. We had retailers, like Token Bitters, Mojo Jojo Pickles. We had, you can make a cocktail or a mocktail, you can you know make a charcuterie board. And then we had cafes, we had um, sit down restaurants, we had takeout counters. We were trying to showcase, you know, you don't have to box yourself into a specific type of food just because you are Black and showcase that there are some successful people in Edmonton's food scene that are not doing that as well.

**Shobhana:** What do you think your long-term goal with it would be? Or is there something even beyond Feed the Soul?

**Rochelle:** One thing about Feed the Soul is that we really like connected and brought the Black food and beverage businesses together and I'd love to see that on a like larger Pan-Canadian scale, whether that's having little like citywide or regional pockets or just like creating an ecosystem where businesses like talk and learn from one another. I know that um Token Bitters, so Keenan Pascal, he was saying that one thing he loves about my projects is that you're able to

network. He's in manufacturing, like he owns the building that they're manufacturing out of, and he has so much knowledge that he can impart to other people, but he also exists in a different ecosystem that allowed him to get there. And he's learning that knowledge too. So, it's kind of like this like cycle of like what am I learning? Who am I getting things from? I've struggled with branding, who are you using for branding? Just sharing all the ins and outs that you don't think go into a business. I never wanted to be an entrepreneur. And so I've learned a lot about you can't just like, "Hey, I'm going to have an event." Nobody's going to show up.

**Shobhana:** Yeah

**Rochelle:** So, um, just learning. How do you do social media? What about a website? Who's your web designer? Like, do you have a social media person or you doing it on your own? Those little digital items really make or break a business. And so when you add in, like, where are you getting your procurement line from? Who are your partners? Are you like supporting...keeping the Black dollar in the Black community?

**Shobhana:** Yeah.

**Rochelle:** I think when you look at the Black community, people buy our culture, but we don't always invest in our own culture. And so I think something like Feed the Soul allows business owners to be like, oh, I can actually get like injera directly from you instead of, I don't know, getting it off of GFS. I don't know if they actually sell that but you know like, looking at how do we like support one another and incorporate each other into our business model.

**Shobhana:** The idea of soul food was something that we were curious about, especially in trying to situate it within a Canadian context. In speaking with Rochelle, we appreciated how she is working to brand soul food beyond African and Caribbean cuisine, and how her interpretation of soul food offers multitudes. We also asked the same question of what soul food means to Wendie and to Beatrice and Bernice.

**Rochelle:** I think there's a lot we could do with it. I think it could go beyond food as well. But I also think that it's not just food from Black owned restaurants that need to feed your soul either. I think of it as like comfort food as something you want to like remember being at home. You want to remember an experience. I think that for me, when I think of soul food, I think of like a Sunday dinner. So my parents both being from Trinidad, we would have rice and peas with callaloo, which is a coconut milk with, we use spinach up here cause we don't have dasheen leaves, stewed chicken or stewed beef, macaroni pie. So I just think of the traditional foods that I was eating that my friends weren't eating as well. I think soul food also means like, like a smokehouse, like your briskets and your fried chickens and pulled pork and all of that. So I don't think it really like boxes in. Is it like southern cooking? Is it something that makes you like feel warm and fuzzy inside?

**Courtney:** What does soul food mean to you then when you hear that term?

**Wendie:** It's food that has memory, right? Because I always think of that, is the missing ingredient that people quite often overlook when they're cooking, like, so good, right? Someone really put their soul into that, someone really put their sweat into that, someone really made that food really intentional. And right, they weren't just trying to get it out on the plate as quick as possible. They're putting their all into it. And so whenever I make traditional African-Nova Scotian food, the dishes that my mother made, I'm thinking about her. Right? So that's an extra, that extra piece of love that x step missing ingredient that you quite often don't see in spaces and places where you get a meal, right. It's that you know, you know when someone put love into the food because it's not just good. It's delicious. It's so good, right? Yeah, I had a meal like that last night and I couldn't stop talking about it.

**Shobhana:** The boundaries of Soul Food is a topic that came up in our conversations with Black chefs and elders too, such as Bernice and Beatrice, who were heard from in Africville.

**Courtney:** What do you define as soul food?

**Beatrice:** Black food. These recipes.

**Beatrice:** You know chicken, chicken wings anything like.... we get pork chops. My brothers used to bring home pork chops and cook the pork chops. We used to get, when they killed, slaughtered the cows, the man in the slaughterhouse now, you'd take the cow head, skin the fur and stuff off it and give them to us. The meat that came off of that was meat, good meat.

**Bernice:** And that's where you get that cheese, that blue cheese.

**Beatrice:** And the brains of the animals. That was food. Anything you ate that is good for the soul, it's soul food.

**Courtney:** We started this episode in Africville, where we heard from Bernice and Beatrice about some of their early food memories in Africville before the government forced them off their lands. We learned that there were memories of food that relied on the land, family, and church life. Stories of abundance and care amongst each other, so that community members were feed. Some of these recipes are archived *In the Africville Kitchen: The Comforts of Home*, a cookbook that is linked in our show notes.

**Shobhana:** Black food history in Canada also relies on are other kinds of migration stories. This work to recuperate and recenter food justice and memory in Nova Scotia's and Edmonton's Black food communities is led by figures like Wendie Wilson, an educator and activist who we also heard from in this episode, and Rochelle Ignacio through her work and capacity building in Feed the Soul YEG. As we navigate Canada's food histories and continue to unearth stories of Black people and the food industry, it is important to keep these stories in mind as we move forward to challenge and rethink food cultures today and the "food futures" we want to imagine, especially in relation to food accessibility and justice for Black communities, and also the place of diverse Black, African, and diasporic foodscapes today and the chefs and food activists that

make them possible. Because at the heart of the work that Wendie and Rochelle are doing is community building.

### **Show Notes:**

In the Africville Kitchen: the Comforts of Home: <https://globalnews.ca/news/7525412/africville-cookbook/>

### **Museums in Ontario**

Black Historical Society & Black Mecca Museum  
<https://ckbhs.org/>

Amherstburg Freedom Museum  
<https://amherstburgfreedom.org/permanent-exhibits/>

Museums in Halifax

**Afri-Can FoodBasket:** Non-profit organization committed to reducing hunger and enhancing cultural food access and health, within African Caribbean and Black communities in the GTA.  
<https://africanfoodbasket.ca/>

**For more on Anan Lololi:** <https://efao.ca/member-profile-anan-xola-lololi-27-years-of-black-food-sovereignty-and-counting/>

### **Resources:**

Future Ancestors: <https://www.futureancestors.ca/>

Toronto Food Incubator: <https://www.ventureparklabs.ca/food-incubator>

Feed the Soul: <https://feedthesoulyeg.ca/>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/andrew-coppolino-black-culinary-history-elusive-1.6338546>

Brown-Kubisch, Linda. 2004. *The Queen’s Bush Settlement: Black Pioneers 1839-1865*. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books.

- “The Queen’s Bush settlers produced a variety of crops such as, barley and oats with wheat being the primary cash crop. They also raised cattle, horses, sheep and hogs; planted orchards and a variety of garden crops, including turnips, potatoes and beans. Families also took advantage of the sugar maple tree in the forest and produced maple sugar every spring” (pp. 43).
- “Women were primarily responsible for the management of the household and care of the children. They preserved fruits and vegetables, spun wool into thread, wove cloth on handmade looms, quilted, made soap and candles from lard, raised poultry and cured meat” (pp. 43).