

**Matt Bowles:** My guest today is Sojourner White. She is the train travel queen, remote social worker and award-winning travel journalist behind [Sojournies](#), a platform that helps nine to fivers fulfill their career goals and bucket list dreams to bask in more freedom and flexibility outside the office. Originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she has lived in Spain, Germany and is now a world traveling digital nomad. As a proud multi hyphenate creator and solo traveler, Sojourner has been featured in Travel and Leisure, USA Today, Lonely Planet, TripAdvisor and the list goes on.

Sojourner, welcome to the show.

**Sojourner White:** Hello. Thank you for having me. I'm excited to chat.

**Matt Bowles:** I am so excited to have you here. Let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today and also the fact that we have agreed to make this a virtual wine night. So, let's also talk about what we are drinking.

I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, NC today and I have just opened a red blend from Bordeaux. So, I will be drinking through that this evening. But where are you Sojourner, and what are you drinking?

**Sojourner White:** I am in my childhood room which is full of bright yellow walls in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and I actually have a glass of wine for my sister. She lived in Chicago, which is not too far from Milwaukee, about an hour and a half actually on the train. And she got some wine she brought to my death to my 20s party last weekend and it's from Hyde Park actually in Chicago from City Winery. So, a little closer to home.

**Matt Bowles:** Love that. Well, one of the many things that you and I have in common is our appreciation for international wine experiences. Wine is definitely something that I travel for, and I want to ask you about maybe just a couple places that you have had wine experiences that you have had around the world. And maybe I will just start by asking you about the Rioja wine region in Spain.

I have been drinking Rioja wines for quite some time and I actually planned a trip specifically to Rioja for a wine experience. I went to the wine museum in Rioja, and I went around to a bunch of the wineries. But you have spent more time there than I have, for sure. And I'm curious for you, just from a wine perspective, what is the environment like in Rioja? What is the wine tasting experience like for people that have never been so.

**Sojourner White:** Rioja is where I lived, and I taught English for a year after undergrad, and I didn't know what to expect because I felt like my understanding of Spain was like Madrid and the south essentially was how I understood the country.

So, Rioja, I wouldn't say it's a mid-sized city. Milwaukee is like more of a mid-sized city. I would say it was a smaller city at the time, like 150,000 people. But the wine culture is big. When I had nothing to do on the weekend, I would just pick a winery to go to. Like, okay, which one haven't I gone to? It was like €12, €15, caught the bus or there was some in town, you just walked to them.

Wine was also in 2016, 2017, it was 80 cents. So, we would go to Calle Laurel was the one that we went to in Logroño, and they had Pincho Pote on Thursday nights where it was kind of like buy one, get one almost when it came to wine and pinchos, which are just the small plates they have in Rioja.

So, you would just go down this little street in each place or was known for a certain pincho. And then you would get a glass of wine to go with it. So that was my Thursday nights and my Friday nights and my Saturday nights when we didn't travel on the weekend. So, my liver, I don't know how she survived, but I guess because it was like the best wine I've ever had. It was chill.

**Matt Bowles:** That's what's up. And the thing is, for Americans, one of the most magical things about going and spending time in Europe is how inexpensive really good wine is compared with the United States. I mean, it is a fraction of the price for the same glass in the United States. If you have it over in Europe. And it will just blow your mind.

**Sojourner White:** Yeah, it was wild. With the very first receipt we got from going out, we're like, this can't be right. This isn't how much the wine costs. So, it was probably the coolest experience, I think, just to say that I lived in Spanish wine country.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I want to also ask you, going from the Old World wine regions to the New World wine regions. I also have to ask you about one of my very favorite wine regions, which is the South African wine region in and around Cape Town, which I know you have been to. Can you share a little bit about what that experience was like for you and what is the South African wine region like?

**Sojourner White:** Yes, we did a half day tour because you could spend some time going to the wine area in Cape Town, but we did like a half day tour. You know, just having wine for breakfast was super chill. What you do on vacation, we went through, me and my sister caught like a \$600 round trip flight out of Chicago to South Africa back in 2022.

And so, we just had to take it, and we knew we had to go to the wine region. We spent like half a day just hopping around. I mean, the thing about wine is that I couldn't tell it was South African wine, but it did have a newer taste, I feel like, compared to some of the Spanish wines that I had. Like, I feel like you can kind of taste the age a bit more because they've been doing the wine so long in Spain.

But, like, there was a freshness about the South African wine that felt a bit, oh, this is like refreshing. I just kind of woke up in the morning, had a glass of wine. It was totally chill. It was fine. That's what you're supposed to do with that wine is what it felt like.

**Matt Bowles:** And it's just one of the most beautiful, I think, wine regions to just go and spend time and hang out at the vineyards and just really enjoy the scenery while you're learning about the wines and drinking some really amazing wines.

So, Jenner, I want to go all the way back now and give folks a little context on you and talk a little bit about your background. And I thought a good place to start, even before we start talking about your story. Can you share a little bit, just for context, about where your parents are from and then where you grew up?

**Sojourner White:** So, my parents are not from Milwaukee. My mom is from Pittsburgh and my dad is from St. Louis. They actually moved to Milwaukee due to work. And so that's how I ended up growing up in Milwaukee. So, it definitely shaped my travel story because I was always in the car going to visit family in St. Louis or Pittsburgh a lot and got used to being on the road.

And also, it helped me travel at a very young age and really introduced me to what it meant to, like, you know, pack up the car, pack up the truck, pack up the kids, pack up the snacks, get some things to do and just sit back and relax and enjoy the ride.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask you about your name and your namesake for people that are not familiar with who Sojourner Truth was, especially for our international audience. For example, can you share a little bit about who Sojourner Truth was and the affinity that your mother had for her?

**Sojourner White:** Yes. We have family, actually, on my mom's side in Battle Creek, Michigan, which is where Sojourner Truth is actually buried. So that's where her burial site is. They have. I don't know how tall the statue is. It's like 13 ft. It's a huge statue of her in the city. But she grew up going to Battle Creek, and in her words, there was nothing to do. Battle Creek is known for Kellogg's Assyrria.

It has, like, more to do today. But back when she was a child, mind you, she was born in the 60s. It really wasn't a whole lot going on for a young Black girl in the summertime going to visit her aunt. So, one day she said she was, like, bored or didn't know what to do, and my great aunt Willa Mae gave her, I can't remember, it was the Narrative of Gender Truth or the Autobiography of Gender Truth, but one of those books, she gave it to her, and my mom read it and fell in love with the story.

And she's an abolitionist, women's rights activist. She was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree, and then, once she got her freedom, changed her name to Sojourner. She was a very, like, religious woman. And so that's how her *Ain't I a Woman?* speech got popularized, because she became this activist. I think a lot of people talk about Susan B. Anthony and a lot of other women in history, but I think she's somebody who often gets forgotten because she actually paved the way for a lot of those folks to have the platforms that they were able to have.

So, my mom read it, fell in love, was like, okay, when I have a daughter, I'm going to name her Sojourner. And I came along, and my dad's also a history teacher of US History, so I don't really actually know his perspective, to be honest. I feel like he didn't object because he also had an affinity for history. So, it all worked out. But if you ask her. She'll say that she gives herself credit for naming me Sojourner.

But the travel part, she said even she couldn't have predicted that. So that was more of me kind of putting my own spin on my name, which is kind of cool in hindsight.

**Matt Bowles:** It's so amazing. Can you talk about your trips to Battle Creek, Michigan, over the years and your evolving connection with the legacy of Sojourner Truth?

**Sojourner White:** Yeah. So, I feel like growing up, I was a very shy kid and having a name. Sojourner is not a shy name. So, I would always feel awkward because my mom's friends or like, older folks were like, oh, my gosh, that's such a powerful name. I'm like, okay, like, no pressure, you know, I just want to go outside and play Double Dutch with my friends. Like, I'm not trying to have a history lesson right now. I was very much a young girl and whatnot.

And so, something I had to, like, grow into and kind of appreciate in my own time because it's a lot to, you know, be named after and live up to, but that's kind of how my mom works. So, when I was in the fifth grade, I actually went to Battle Creek, I think for the first time that I can at least remember. And part of me going was I did a whole photo album, book report about it. It's somewhere in my here, but we still have it.

And I did write a whole essay about what it meant to, you know, to visit her statue, to see her burial site. There's a photo of me with some very, I used to have, like, really get my hot comb flat ironed hair. There's a picture of me with some ponytails that are very much sweat out. The humidity got to them. I'm just

cheesing in front of her burial site. And then it's like, little old me. I haven't grown since then. I'm still 5'1 and like the big old statue next to it.

And so, it was funny because then I went back. I want to say, after undergrad, that was like 2005. The first time I think I went back in 2016 is when I, like last went. And it's so funny, my hair is still sweated out because it was still summertime. But yeah, it was me just there. And I feel like by the time I went there at 21, I felt like I had more of, uh, okay, this is like also my name because it's something I feel like I had to grow into.

It wasn't 100% mine when you're named after someone, especially someone who you don't know. Someone who was kind of this figment, not of your imagination, but, like, it's kind of this thing that is just kind of there. And so, by the time I went from 2016, I'm like, oh, no, this is my name. And so, I definitely live into it now, I think just also whistle journeyer, meaning traveler and someone who stays temporarily. It all kind of came full circle.

So, shout out to my mom for really pushing me to learn about her, even when I was like, I just wanted to be a kid. I could be a kid and also learn some history at the same time.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk about some of your other domestic travels when you were coming up, including going to other regions of the country, leaving the Midwest, going to the American south, and so forth, and how all of that impacted you?

**Sojourner White:** I think all of the travel we did when I was a kid, because I grew up as, like, the only girl with four brothers. We were always on road trips because five kids and two parents, that's a lot of flights. I think all of the travel we did going from Milwaukee to St. Louis was like six hours, five depending upon the time of day and how fast you drive.

But Milwaukee to Pittsburgh, like 12 hours. My stepdad's family has roots in Louisiana, so they are from Bastrop, Louisiana. But I used to go to New Orleans and all different places, and I feel like that really impacted me now, being a train traveler and being used to sitting for a lot of hours, because Milwaukee to New Orleans is a smooth 18, could be 24 with kids and all the stops and the bathroom breaks.

So, I felt like I just had things to do. And even now, the things I bring with me on train trips, like my word searches in my book, those are things my mom used to, like, say, okay, pack up your backpack. Bring, like, your CD player. I'm kind of aging myself, but I did have a CD player with SpongeBob SquarePants, so I would pack that up. Now I have podcasts and, you know, Apple music and everything.

But it's very similar to how I travel now and why I'm so comfortable being on the train. But those family trips and just seeing family, I think there's always an interesting dynamic because a lot of my friends, you know, grew up going down South. We grew up going to visit family. That was what I thought traveling was. I didn't know you could go to, like, these faraway places for real. Like, that wasn't my understanding.

I've been to like the Grand Canyon for one spring break. And being in Wisconsin, we have, like, Wisconsin Dales, like, a big old water park. So going to the water parks in the summertime but really going out of the country just didn't really seem like a thing until I started learning Spanish in the fifth, sixth grade.

**Matt Bowles:** So, let's talk about that journey and the evolution in your interest in international travel. And then what eventually changed and made you feel that that was possible?

**Sojourner White:** I am your classic, like, Black girl overachiever. I've always been really good at school, really into reading and writing. I've always loved school. It's been a thing. And so, I heard that there was a Spanish club starting in, like, fifth grade that I had joined. That was my first introduction to learning Spanish.

And I went to art schools for kindergarten to eighth grade, which meant I had music, art, drama, dance on a weekly basis in Milwaukee public schools growing up. So, I had all of that, plus foreign languages were like, oh, this, like, rounds out my whole experience. And so, when I went on to middle school, they had a Spanish program, and I had a teacher named Senora Defino. And she really kind of took me under her wing. She saw that I liked Spanish, that I was good at it, and she really developed me, I would say, as far as giving me extra things to do or challenging me on certain things at, like, in the sixth grade, which, again, I would love school.

So, I took the challenge, and from there, that really shaped my Spanish experience. And so, when I went on to high school, I went through the International Baccalaureate, or IB program in high school. So, I took IB, Spanish, and I took the exam, and I got a five, which meant I could skip a class once I got to college. So, then I end up majoring in psychology and Spanish when I got to undergrad. And I actually was going to quit. Surprisingly, even after all that time, I just felt like it was pretty stagnant. I also have a stutter, so you can't really hear it as much now in English, but I learned later that is actually in Spanish.

There's a whole other story. But I was really nervous, and so my stutter came out a lot when I had to speak Spanish. And so, I was like, I don't know. I don't know, Mom. She's like, no, you're going to need this. Stick with it. I'm like, okay, girl. Well, if I could study abroad, then I'll, like, stick with it. And once I learned you could use your FAFSA to study abroad, because I couldn't afford the short-term programs that at that time were like \$4,000. I'm like, I don't have that.

But when I learned I could already use all the scholarships, I already had to go for five months instead of like two weeks. And also, I almost got a D in a class in undergrad. I'm like, I don't fail. So, something's wrong. We had to go and rejuvenate, be refreshed or something. And so that's how I ended into Spain. Once I put all that together and thought, well, I'm already paying the money to be in Peoria, Illinois. I went to Bradley University. Let me just go to Spain and see what happens. And I did. And honestly, the rest is history when it comes to how it changed my entire career path.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, let's talk about that experience for people that know Spain. They know that there are very different cultural regions of Spain. So, can you talk about where in Spain you went to study abroad? Your very first time in Spain, and then what was that experience like for you?

**Sojourner White:** Yeah. So, for study abroad, everyone at my undergrad, like, I went to a mid-sized school, so it wasn't like a big school with all these programs. But everyone loved Granada, Spain. Like, everyone talked about how great Granada was. They thought it was a great study abroad city. So, I'm like, okay, I'll just go to Granada. I've never been out of the country. I don't know what to expect, but I'll definitely go.

I remember carrying around the brochure for a month. Anytime I was bored or needed motivation, I would pull it out and just look at the Alhambra. Like, oh my gosh, I'm going to be there in a few months. I would just review all the courses, like, I was so ready. And so I was in southern Spain, which is a very interesting region to be in, just in general because of its connection to the Moors and being a Black woman and learning about that history, you know, and how Alhambra is technically a Moorish castle. Right.

It was also interesting because we went to Morocco as part of the program. So, I did a Morocco exchange program where we stayed with the host family for a few days. We were in Rabat primarily, but we went to Rabat, Chefchaouen and the Rif Mountains in Asala too. So, it wasn't like the big cities. It was more trying to learn, like my first really intercultural exchange experience ever.

I remember going to a women's center where they learned how to weave and whatnot. I'm like, oh, this is interesting. It's like, stuff that we do at home. So, it was also cool to make those connections. But I love Granada. I fell in love with Granada so hard. I started listening to Spanish music. Belinda was my jam. I was obsessed with this. I just didn't know that this was a thing that people were over here, like, for five months, kicking it in the country and learning.

And the classes were a lot lighter, you know, because they wanted you to be out there talking to people. And that's actually what I learned. I did have my stutter in Spanish, ironically, I learned that when you, like, I had a speech pathologist when I was younger in elementary school. That kind of got rid of my stutter for the most part in English, it only comes out when I'm nervous or very excited.

But I learned in Spanish that it doesn't transfer over. So, I also have to do some extra work and, like, practicing a bit more because I was getting nervous because I was over here speaking a language. And again, I had the perfectionist overachiever still in me. So afraid to make mistakes. But it definitely tore down some of those walls and being like, girl, you are going to mess up. You are going to conjugate a thing wrong. You're going to say a thing wrong. And so, I wanted to make sure that I was doing everything I could to make it the best semester ever. And it's easy to do in southern Spain. It's gorgeous.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I want to also ask you about your experience later on, going back to Spain and living in the Rioja region that you mentioned at the beginning. Can you share a little bit about the context for that experience, but also then contrast the difference between Granada and Andalusia versus Rioja in the more northern part of Spain?

**Sojourner White:** It's funny because before I studied abroad, that's when I first learned about these teach English abroad programs. Because when I was telling people I was going abroad, they're like, oh, so and so say they brought in Granada, then went to go teach English for a year. I was like, what do you mean? They were go teach English. Like, what are you talking about? So, then I went on a deep dive, and that's when I first learned about Fulbright. And it's funny because again, I majored in psychology and Spanish. I assumed that you had to have an English degree to go teach English or you had to have, like, an education background.

So, I read about the program. I'm like, oh, this is really cool. But like, oh, my God qualifies. So, I didn't really think anything of it. I am going abroad, have an incredible semester. I'm like, yeah, again, Black girl, overachiever. I thought I was going to go straight from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree to a PhD. That was actually where I thought I was headed. I studied abroad. All that went out the window. I'm like, absolutely no. Like I'm not doing none of that in that order. Like I'm not interested anymore.

So, it absolutely changed, and I ended up just saying, all right, subscribe that all them programs I was looking at applying to for grad school, we're not applying to any of that. We're going to put all our energy into applying for Fulbright. What I didn't know was how prestigious Fulbright was. I knew it was good. I didn't fully understand until after I submitted, and I saw some stats and I'm looking for my school of like the

Fulbright top institutions. I'm like, we are not there. We are not there. So, I don't know what I just applied to but now I'm nervous.

But it was literally I got back; I remember in June 2015 from study abroad was super enthralled. But I was starting a summer job at a, I was a camp counselor for almost every summer. And in between I remember having again overachiever planner. I'm a Virgo as well. I had like a planner of literally in between counseling kids and taking them to their classes. I was writing my essays in my planner because at my undergrad it was a whole class. So, I got credit for applying to Fulbright. I got an A because it was just writing some essays but because it's so intense they consider it a class.

And I had a one-on-one advisor. His name was Dr. Conley, which is like a really good benefit of going to a smaller school that isn't necessarily known for Fulbrighters because it was definitely more interpersonal. So, I was writing an essay to send to him. He was an English chair I think at the time. Getting feedback, writing more essays, reviewing them, having my mom look at it because her degree is actually in English too. But also, she knows me so she's like making sure that I'm still showing who I am and likes our story because she's my mother so she knows my story better than I do most days.

Just making sure we were writing the best essays possible, get recommendations from Spanish teachers and mentors and putting all the things again. I was super involved. I was a tour guide in undergrad, I was an RA. I was leading a mentor program for first year Black and Brown students. Like, I was super heavily involved. And with on top of that having internships and all that kind of stuff. So, putting all of that literally on the table for Fulbright and submitting my apps in October and then realizing that maybe I overshot my chances when I saw that list.

But come January, I got the semifinalist email. So, I was like, okay, made through the first round in March, I was literally at home back in Milwaukee during spring break in the car with one of my friends and my mom. And I screamed. They screamed, I scrumped. My mom said I better not yell like that. Ever get in her car while she is driving.

But we were on our way to lunch, and we ended up celebrating me getting Fulbright. And it was the whole thing. I was on the news; I got an award. Like, it was a big thing, obviously for me. But also, just being a Black girl from the Midwest, from Milwaukee, it's a city that has a lot of stereotypes. A lot of people often meet me like, oh, my God, you're from Milwaukee. Like, I heard XYZ. I'm like, yep, that's where I'm from. And like, it is home. And it's complicated, but it's home. It's like the place that raised me and shaped me.

So, it ended up being a really cool experience. And seeing people even to this day were like, I remember you. I told my daughter; you need to apply for Fulbright. Whatever she did, you need to go ahead and do so. I still get moms to the day telling me that when I'm walking around the city. So, it would end up being a very beautiful kind of experience. Just to round out a really cool senior year and then propel me into living abroad and being in northern Spain, which is not the same as southern Spain.

It's a whole different thing. Northern Spain is almost like Seattle, Midwest. It's rainy. It's not this sunny, hot grass looks a little burnt kind of area like Southern spade is. It's definitely, it felt more Midwestern to me, climate wise. And then culturally too, I felt like there's definitely more alignment with French culture almost because you're so close up there. Then you have like Basque country. They're Basque, not Spanish. That's the whole thing that's up there.

So, I learned about more of the other regions of Spain because they have all the autonomous communities. People I think don't understand. They're kind of like operate as states almost. Each one is its own regional cultural thing. So, it was a lot. And then they were like Pinchos and not tapas, even though they're kind of the same thing, but y'all call them Pinchos. And then they got an X in it. I'm like, wait, what does that mean?

So, it was like learning about the north and the south of the United States. And I think it was cool to have a parallel of living in two different parts of one country, because even as a traveler and tourist, you remember going to one or two cities, that are probably closer to each other because you only have so much PTO. But when you're living somewhere or studying abroad somewhere, like being in southern Spain and hearing the, like, the gracia serifa and then going to northern Spain, they don't say that at all. Like, that's not even in there, like, dialect.

So, it definitely was a more in-depth experience about Spain. And also, the other side of that is, like, the more you learn about a country, the more you're like, I don't think I like that. You know? So also, like, the rose-colored glasses were kind of off when it came to being in Granada. That was my first time out of the country ever.

And now I'm in this other part and I'm learning stuff like, okay, I like y'all wine is great. This over here, though, I'm not sure I like this culturally. So, I think that was the other thing for me was learning the difference between studying abroad in a place and actually living abroad. And those are two very different experiences, very different things with paperwork and bureaucracy and all that kind of stuff, too.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask you about how that time in Spain shaped your career trajectory and some of the professional choices that you made in terms of pursuing social work, doing your master's degree, and the specific concentrations that you chose to focus on things like international development and social entrepreneurship and that kind of stuff. So, can you share a little bit about how that year then shaped that next step and what you did after Rioja?

**Sojourner White:** Yes. So, Fulbright was interesting because I really love the international parts. I love the international ed part. Meeting folks from all across the globe. Truly an international exchange, multicultural exchange experience. But I also knew for me that I wanted just again, growing up black and the United States, I was looking for more a racial nuance, too, in some of that, that I didn't feel like I necessarily got to the degree I expected because, you know, like, oh, it's a prestigious program.

Like, I'm sure they've had a lot of Black students then you, like, at the time it was 2% or 3%. It was pretty low at the time. Once I kind of did more research on the statistics, I don't know what it is in 2024 now, but I think for me, I love this part, but I want like a little more of the racial, social, political. Like I want a little bit more of that and how do I blend the two together? And so, I decided to leave Spain after that first year. I did think about staying, but I'm like, I think I need to go figure some other stuff out. Like some stuff felt unfinished. I think during that year I also realized I didn't have any hobbies because all my hobbies were attached to school.

So, I really got into photography and creativity. I was like, okay, what do I do with this? I'm 22 years old, I have my whole life ahead of me. What do I do? I ended up coming back home. I did an AmeriCorps program called Public Allies that was a bit more social justice focused. But again, I didn't want to commit to a full-time job because I was figuring things out, doing another year long program. Okay, maybe I'll find a blend. And through that program, a friend of a friend actually recommended this international social work

program. And I looked at her and I said social work? I don't think so. I don't know. And also, what is international social work? Like, I don't know what that means. I don't know what that is. But again, I was kind of in the exploratory phase, like being curious. I'm a very curious person. I'm like, okay, let me go in and figure this out.

So, I go in, I'm like, actually this kind of sounds like what I want to do because it has the international focus, but also it has the systemic things that I'm like, I noticed even in Spain, right. Because there was a divide between me as a Black woman and the other Africans that I met. And they even noticed it too, because I ended up talking to some of them while I was there, you know, at a bus stop, one of the moms and her son, they were looking at me like, you kind of look like us, but like you not the same as us.

And so, through all of that too, and understand that dynamic, I really got interested in the larger context. And I felt like international development has its faults as well. But I was able to kind of explore that a bit more and learn about it a bit more to figure out how I wanted to show up internationally. And I think through that I learned a lot about my privileges that I didn't even know I had.

Especially being someone from the US and speaking English and all these other things that I really don't phase me as much in the US that phase me a lot more when I went abroad. So, it also put into context a lot of things I was experiencing in Fulbright, but I didn't have the language to name what it was. Like there's something happening here. I just don't know what it is. That program was really good in connecting the two because I was learning about. About social work stuff here, you know, learned about systems here, but also had this international component to my classes.

And then the social entrepreneurship really was, because I think deep down, I knew I was going to be an entrepreneur in some way, shape or form down the career pipeline. And so, I was like, okay, let me see what this is about. And it kind of gave me a cool mix of international work, social work, and also some business and social impact work too, which is definitely something I like to do.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, let me ask you if you can expand on that a little bit. Now, reflecting back on some of those different identity dynamics and privilege dynamics. One of the things that you write a lot about on [Sojournies](#) is your experience as a Black woman, specifically in a lot of these different places around the world.

And one of the really important nuances that I appreciate you just share sharing, is that the experience of a Black woman might be different depending on which country the Black woman is from, if she speaks with an American accent or an accent, for example, from the African continent, et cetera. And I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about how your realization of some of those dynamics came about and what your reflections on that, is today.

**Sojourner White:** It was wild when it was happening, and it was happening in a vacuum. And that was before I had [Sojournies](#), right? I wasn't really doing it, and I didn't know a lot of Black folks who had lived abroad. And so, in the moment, I'm like, this feels odd, but I can't explain why it's odd because I think in the US, I think we are racialized as Black folks in a way where it seems very insular.

And then you go out into the world, and you realize it's not insular. And so how do you kind of rectify that and try to understand that? And so, there was a, like, people will ask me what part of Africa I'm from. I'm like, I don't understand this question because I'm in Europe and y'all colonized. Like, it wasn't making sense to me while they were asking me these questions.

So, I learned a little bit about their system and how the way they're taught slavery is a bit different than the way we are taught it, or that my parents actually honestly taught me about my history when it comes to that. I think that was one of the biggest things that people stopping me and asking me, oh, you look Nigerian, you look this. I'm like, maybe down the line, but I was born in the US and then seeing people's confusion when I would say, I'm like, I'm Black American, I'm from Milwaukee, like I'm from Wisconsin.

And they will be so perplexed, but in the same breath, you call me Obama, but you understand there are Black people in the US but for some reason it's not working. And so, I think I wish I could tell myself back then was, girl, you only talk to other people to figure this out. Other Black folks who have been through it. So, you can understand that you weren't alone. Because it felt very isolated at times. But you can, because I was like one of the few Black folks, one in Fulbright, but also two in my study abroad program.

And my white counterparts weren't getting asked these questions. They weren't contemplating these things. They were listening to me, you know, because we were friends, but like, it wasn't really the same. And so, I think looking back on it, that's also why I really got into travel writing. And writing for it was called Black Women in Spain website because it was a hub of women who were in Spain also experiencing the same things. I went to my first international conference through them in Madrid and it was wild just to see all these Black women in Spain. I'm like, wait, there's a lot of us here.

Then learn about Afro Spaniards and their struggles and how it's very similar to what Black Americans have experienced as far as like, having more representation in society. So, it was a very multi layered experience. Then folks would approach me in French thinking I was from the continent, and then I would speak English. They were like, wait, American, hold up. And then it was a whole different dynamic and it was wilder.

When I realized people were treating me better. When they realized that I spoke English, I saw it in their face. They didn't say it, but I saw it in their eye. Like, ooh, you're not like the other ones. Which is not a good thing to think. But like, I saw the recognition of like, I can talk to you because you're from the US which even that is a bit complicated because being a Black American, we didn't just show up over here, you know, that's not the history. It was a forced migration; it was forced enslavement.

And so, it's very complicated when you have a privilege based on someone else's struggle. Your ancestors struggle in particular. And I don't think I had the words to even say this now then because I was so processing it. But over time it's like, okay, I found other folks who've experienced the same thing. I'm not going crazy. This is a thing that's happening. And so, it was really nice to kind of have that affirmation. But I learned a lot about racial dynamics, ethnicity, nationality, class as well, because the US dollar is pretty strong and understanding how that also shaped my travel experiences and even colorism. Right. I'm not a dark-skinned Black woman, I'm not a light skinned Black woman. But I also was around dark-skinned Black women who got comments I never got.

So even amongst Black folks there was also another layer of dynamics too. So, it's a very complex conversation when you put everyone's identities on the table and one thing can affect somebody more than the other.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask about your master's degree experience and what led you to Germany. And I'm also curious, just based on this discussion we've been having, how you found Germany to be in this regard compared to your experience in Spain.

**Sojourner White:** It was interesting because Granada and La Rioja and like aren't big cities. So I was in Berlin, I was like, oh, this is different. I didn't live in Madrid; I didn't live in Barcelona. I had the U Bahn. I love publishing public transport. That's one of my origin stories in the US is how we don't have good public transport because I love using public transport.

So, I was enthralled with like Berlin also. It is more of an international city compared to the rest of Germany, from what I've learned over time was that it's like a big hub for folks. So, I will go to this place called Yam Berlin where I would see a bunch of Black folks, primarily from the continent, I would say. But that's where a lot of people would go for music on the weekends and stuff. And so, there were different hustle in Berlin in a way where I didn't find that in Longoria or Granada. It just wasn't there because more homogenous places to live. Was also understanding what it meant to be a Black woman in a Homogenous country was a new thing because the US is not homogenous.

And so that was the other parallel that I didn't realize I had been used to until I was like, oh, I am the only one over here, like in this, in this grocery store right now doing X, Y and Z. And so being in Berlin felt like a more big city vibe. Like, okay, I can kind of blend in a little bit here. It's also a very transient city from what I've gathered too. There were people who I work with at the company I was at because my professor actually started her company in Germany. She's Canadian, Dr. Cameron, and she started Boxgirls International. She was a professor, but also taught boxing to young girls as a way for self-defense.

And as someone who went through girls programming as a child, I worked at Girl scouts during my AmeriCorps year. Girls education work is like really important to me. And so that's why I chose to work under her again. Planned it out. I scoped the website. I'm like, if I'm going to go to school, I'm going to work with her. I was in her office like month two of my first year.

Hi, I'm Sojourner. I'm a Fulbright scholar. Listen to my resume. I want to work with you. How do I do it? And she loved my tenacity, so it was great. And so, I was able to go to Berlin for a summer, but definitely love Berlin and just the multicultural vibe I was around. I got linked up with like the Black Lives Matter group there. They hosted more community cultural events too. So, I was able to find community in a way that I don't think I was able to find it as easily because I was in Granada and Longoria, which just aren't places that there are a lot of Black folks living.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also have to ask you then, once you got your master's degree, how did you parlay and carve out a fully remote career in the international social work space? Can you talk a little bit about how you did that and then explain today what exactly are you doing for work?

**Sojourner White:** Well, once upon a time in March 2020, there was a little thing called Covid, and I was in Costa Rica on spring break with two friends and we got this email. I think we just got to La Fortuna. We like, oh, everything's online. Okay. And the next day went like ziplining in the rainforest.

It went over our heads that, like, this was a big global health crisis for real. Like, we had no idea what a pandemic actually was until we got back. We're like, oh, this is real. And so due to the pandemic, I wasn't able to do the international social work career I thought I was going to have because it was a global health crisis. I wasn't trying to go abroad in a global health crisis probably wasn't the smartest thing to do for me.

And so, I was actually pivoting more into being the support staff on traveling study abroad programs. That was actually what I was lining myself up to do, at least for a time by the end of my grad school experience. But those companies actually never even came back due to Covid. So, a lot of them went out of business.

But I thankfully was able to pivot. I have a really good family friend. She's like a big sister. Hey, Monique, if you're listening, she was like, hey girl, do you want a job? I said yes, yes, I do, because I am unemployed. I am actively unemployed.

And so, she offered me a job. She knows I like to travel. She's like, we can just try a year, try for a year. We'll reevaluate, see if you like it, see where you're at. And I'm be four and a half years at the end of the year and I'm still here. This is the longest job I've ever had. And so, I say I'm remote social worker because it's just like a bit simpler. But essentially, I work in research and evaluation consulting. So, the programs that people, the social service program people think social workers lead, I actually evaluate.

So, we do a lot of work around black maternal health. That's a really big issue in the country. But in the Midwest around, honestly, in Milwaukee, but also Omaha, Nebraska, we have a large body of work collaborating with other Black women who are trying to not die in childbirth. Which is definitely a fear that a lot of Black women talk to us about. But also, I've done a lot of evaluation around focus groups, interviews, workshops with like Black entrepreneurs as well as college access programs. So, it's kind of a large body of work, but really any kind of system Black folk's touch. I probably have evaluated a program that talks about it.

Whereas for girls' education we've done like a lot of work in the city with like Dad Doula programs. So, fathers who want to support their partners when they are giving birth. So, it's very unique kind of space to be in, but pretty cool to do because I essentially ask questions for a living and get paid to ask open ended questions and write reports about this is what we found, this what should be improved. Here's our recommendations.

**Matt Bowles:** So, when you are working and traveling at the same time in this digital nomad remote life that you have built for yourself, can you share just a little bit about your daily structure, how you balance work and travel? What are you doing during the day? What does that look like to you?

**Sojourner White:** We do have quite a bit of meetings. I do a lot of interviews or focus groups. Some days I like to book rooms where I do have a little desk because some days I don't want to leave the room. I want to do stuff in my pajamas, even if I'm in another country. So, I do book a room with a desk, or I say like in a lot of Selenas because they're just kind of everywhere and I know what to expect over time.

So, I've stayed in those and worked from their co working spaces. But generally, when I wake up, I try to move my body into some way, whether that's running or yoga or whatever I'm able to do wherever I'm at. And then I'm a morning person, so I like to get my work done in the morning. Like my most pressing work requires me to think very hard in the morning and try to leave meetings for the afternoon if possible. But normally I work a traditional 9 to 5, 9 to 4 is probably more realistic or 8 to 4 is more my speed.

And my happy hour is when I go to a cooking class or a dance class or do something fun after work. Especially if I'm actively traveling. Like, I was in Colombia last year and did a Champeta class after work. And I've done cooking classes, I've done street food tours, I've done just regular walking tours. So, I like to keep it fun, do an activity after work just because I've been behind the computer all day and I want to interact with the country that I'm in in some capacity because, again, I'm on a laptop for most of the day. Or I may go to a cafe halfway through the day and then kind of walk around. Just people watch because it's also one of my favorite activities to do while I'm traveling and working.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. For direct links to everything we have discussed in this episode, as well as all of the ways to find, follow and connect with Sojourner, just go to [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com) go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And there you will find all of the links. And remember to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Sojourner White.

Good night, everybody.