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**[00:01 – 05:15]**

**[Music]**

**Noelle:** What up?

**Miranda:** Welcome to The Unpacked Project.

**Noelle:** We're your hosts. I’m Noelle.

**Miranda:** And I’m Miranda.

**Noelle:** We're here to explore all things social justice. It's through casual conversations, interviews and storytelling that we hope to inspire others to take action towards a more compassionate and equitable world.

**Miranda:** Because honestly, it kind of sucks here sometimes.

**Noelle:** For real. We can do better, people.

**Miranda:** Alright. Let's start unpacking.

 **[Music]**

**Miranda:** Hiiiiii!

**Noelle:** Hey everybody!

**Miranda:** We’re back.

**[Laughter]**

**Noelle:** Hi Miranda.

**Miranda:** Hi Noelle.

 **Noelle:** So, we are back and we are in our third episode…

**Miranda:** Time out because I love how we're like, we're back, it's been a weekend, it's been two weeks! We recorded these shits back to back to back, like we're in the same outfits…

**Noelle:** We're the same clothes…but we're back.

**Miranda:** Yeah, but we are back, for sure.

**Noelle:** Yes, we are back. Here now this will be our third episode in this series that we're talking about, right? And some of the previous episodes that we've talked about were focused on decentering whiteness, we brought up the idea of caucusing, a race-based caucus to be more specific. And how it can actually be a useful anti-racism tool, allowing Black and white folks or people of color and white folk’s time to separately do work because we all have different needs and different reasons why we are engaging in anti-racism work, right? And so, while we've always placed an emphasis on diversifying our social media, and diversifying our friendship groups, and trying to cross racial and ethnic lines in our relationships, that there is value and importance in that. When we talk about actually doing the work internally within ourselves and then trying to make a difference in the world, I think it takes a little bit more than just being able to have a cross racial conversation, right?

**Miranda:** Like come together and Kumbaya.

**Noelle:** Yeah, more than kumbaya at this point, right? And so just, to summarize what our previous two episodes were about in terms of caucuses. When we think of work in people of a Color caucus, really what that's doing is creating a safe space, right? We're trying to create spaces where people can come, talk about trauma, talk about the effects of racism, kind of not have to deal with the harms of having white people in their space when they're discussing these issues and these topics. Creating kind of like an alternative power base, right? And trying to build relationships and support through courageous and difficult conversations with people that have been through similar experiences as you.

In white caucuses, the idea of having people that have had the same experience as you but from a mindset that it's an accountability space, it's not this space where we're dealing with trauma and creating a safe space in that sense but we're creating a space where we can hold each other accountable. And we can work through barriers that we've kind of dealt with as… well not dealt with but that we've kind of put in place as white people, right? We've upheld these barriers in society. And we're allying together to try to work towards these anti-racist goals. So, we're building relationships with one another, deepening and understanding of our power, our privilege; and then building tools that we can collectively use to try to create a more equitable society. There is space for that in dealing with the emotions that were involved in the ladder that we talked about in the last episode; guilt, shame, denial, all of those different emotions that you might go through as you're processing this as a white person and realizing - this is your place in anti-racism work, right? Without causing harm to people of Color, having to sit in the room and listen to that, while we're exploring and processing all this. But then after we've done this work, right? And we've separated, we've done this work for our own needs is there a place we can come together to then collectively move forward. I mean what does that look like, right?

So, I know one of the quotes that I came across when we were doing research for the episode, came from Centering Equity and Collective Impact, and we'll talk about collective impact today and kind of what that can look like from a general perspective but the quote in the article, I thought really spoke to me as like a white person, and it said “more transformative and equitable change happens. However, when we act with community recognizing and building on the people and power it contains. This approach requires that we see communities and residents as assets rather than problems to be solved.” And I really liked that for white people coming into this work.

**[05:16 – 10:04]**

**Miranda:** Yeah. And I think one of the common themes have been decentering whiteness, right? And so when you think of, read that last line again…

**Noelle: “**This approach requires that we see communities and residents as assets rather than problems to be solved.”

**Miranda:** So right, we're coming off of these episodes, where we were talking about harmful narratives and we're trying to change those narratives, and what are these ideas that we have about people, are they assets or liabilities or problems to us, are they threats to us, these things, so that's kind of what it reminds me of. And it's just so true, you know, and I think, this has been really an interesting lens because it's not something that we've heard before…

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** And you've had many years of anti-racism work, so I’m kind of surprised. And even when I did a Google search about caucuses, I found things… when I say recent, that dated back to 2017…

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** When I was looking at dates. I’m sure you could find things that are older but, you know, this has been around for some time. You know what I mean? And I’m surprised in my years of work that I haven't really heard of it.

**Noelle:** Yeah, I think people shy away from the separate; we talked about this in the previous episodes, right? First of all, let's think of who's in leadership positions and organizations a lot of times, right? If I’m this white person in this business or organization, I’m bringing some sort of anti-racist framework into my business or organization or workplace of whatever, what do I look like or how's it going to be perceived if I’m saying we should do caucus work where all the Black employees are going to go and do your work over here and all the white people are going to go… I think people would freak out on the notion of that but I can also think of experiences where we've been across the table like when I worked in New York, in my school district, we got cited for a lot of disproportionate outcomes for Black male students in particular. NYU came in, we had a whole, you know, racism and equity, diversity, inclusion kind of workshop, a number of workshops that NYU came in and helped lead. And those were cross-racial dialogues, you know, we were sitting at the table with people of multiple races and ethnicities. And I remember feeling uncomfortable, like, I don't want to really say what I’m thinking or share my experiences because I don't know how it's going to be received. I don't mean it in a harmful way but you don't know, you only know me as your co-worker or I’m your subordinate or I, you know, like… We don't know each other like that; we don't have that trust, like we talk sometimes about our racial trust, right? That we have that so we can have these conversations. And that's me as a white person who hasn't gone through and been harmed in my life or had to deal with racism or anything. So then how do the people of Color sitting at that table feel, are we really having honest conversations, when we all were just brought in on this Tuesday morning at nine o'clock and boom, let's talk about it.

**Miranda:** Yeah.

**Noelle:** You know, I thought they did a great job in the training but like I don't think any of us authentically showed up to have these conversations.

**Miranda:** Yeah, unearth your traumas and let's talk about white supremacy. It's not dinner table conversation…

**Noelle:** Right. Or these are people you work with; actually my boss is sitting in there. Or, you know someone that I’m going to have to leave here and work with, after now what are we thinking.

**Miranda:** And I think that's the entire point of caucus work, is to get both groups of people to a level of trust. So, yeah, of course, there's learning that needs to be done, you're dealing with previous trauma, you're creating safe spaces where you can be your authentic self. And, you know, different things are happening in each group when we talked about that parallel work, you know. And then you come together because you're ideally at this point where now you can have these clear intentional conversations, where we've unlearned these things that we've been taught, you know, throughout history, since birth, you know. And so for me, you know, quote, it comes from Alex Vlasic from the Arrow, which is an online publication. He says; “my advice for moving into interracial healing is from Adrian Mayer Brown's Principle of Emergent Strategy. Move at the speed of trust, build the resilience by building the relationship. Healing can only occur if we have a foundation of trust and in order to trust others we must first trust ourselves. Cultivating self-trust and trust among community of white people through caucusing establishes a foundation to create trust across racial groups. Taking the time to build interracial relationships and trust not only sets us up to do more of the work of examining racism together but is also part of the healing itself. Just remember that each of us can be at very different places in the process of trust and your level of trust as a white person may or may not align with the people of Color you're hoping to work with.”

**[10:05 – 15:08]**

**Miranda:** So, I hear a few things in there – one, decentering whiteness, right? You know, you as a person who's experienced privileges in life, again we all experience privileges but in this case privileges because of the color of your skin…

**Noelle:** Yeah *unearned*.

**Miranda:** …really vary from the experiences of my walking through this world as a brown skinned woman, you know? And those are things that you just don't and won't understand and that's okay, you know? And so when you start to understand those reasons and how we got here, and then I learn to build trust in the fact that you're doing this work, we then can come to a point and have these experiences where we share at the table various conversations. And I can hear through your words and see through your actions that you've done this work, you understand, you understand the assignment, you know what I mean, so…

**Noelle:** Right. Yeah.

**Miranda:** You know, all of those things. I think our past two episodes really talked about separate caucus work and then this is Collective Action - how do we then come together and move forward? So then the question is - we've done the work, I now trust and you've unlearned, now what?

**Noelle:** Now what? Yeah. Well, and I think, you know, when we think about kind of how we all come into this work, right? And then how it is then received, right, because it takes two sides. We talk about this all the time about how, okay, we have that trust in one another but that's not always going to be the case, how do we start teaching people how to build that, right? And I think when you think of collective action and you look at it from a framework of an asset based approach, right? And reje-- when we talk about the white savior, the article actually that I read the quote from, had said rejecting white savior approaches from the outside really make us lean more into asset-based efforts and cause us to kind of ask questions. This is one of the questions that were asked in the article. What problems do communities want to solve? So, I think one of the big things about caucus work and about collective action to me, if we could find like the main commonality is accountability, right? Like trying to, so when we think about collective impact, really thinking of a network of people, community members, individuals, organizations, institutions, that want to learn together, that want equity, that want to have these actions to achieve these values that we talked about last time, right? Like so when we're talking about being accountable to these values and doing this work, what are the problems that we want to solve? As white people are you looking at it as we need to solve the problems because these people of Color are the problem, right? They're the problems that need to be solved…

**Miranda:** Versus systemic problems…

**Noelle:** Exactly. Like what are the problems that we want to solve? When we think of collective action, I don't know--what do you think about?

**Miranda:** I mean, I think about communities that have been harmed, you know. Actually, just yesterday, again Kwanzaa. I was looking up the principle of the day, it was Ujima… Ujima? And actually what came up was a domestic abuse treatment center in Washington DC, but really they do a lot of work for Black communities, within the community. It's spearheaded by folks who are Black who have been through these experiences. And so it really is rooted in restorative practices, right? And when I think of how communities have been harmed, communities of Color have been harmed, I think about violence in community, safety, resources or access to resources, food, shelter, safety, medical care, right? These very foundational things that because of systems that we have in place, aren't structurally sound in Black communities. And if you just fix some of these problems, you know what I mean, whether it's people that understand how to do the work because they look like you, they've been through it, they live in the community, they have a very clear understanding of what the issues are, you know, or that's funding for these things because money is taken from these programs as well… So there are many ways to restore communities, right? So, those to me are the problems. And getting people to understand, right? Because from MY perspective as a brown person those are problems in our community, right? And there are many other problems too but when we think about foundational things that's a good start.

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** You know…

**Noelle:** And if you've done the work in the white caucus, you would understand why we're saying that!

**Miranda:** Yeah. But then on the flip side it's to understand from the white caucus, these problems are not problems that we “just created” ourselves.

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** You know what I mean? They're there intentionally. We’re underfunded, these narratives that we…right? So those are both of the things that need to happen in my mind.

**[15:09 – 20:19]**

**Noelle:** Yeah. One of the articles that I had read and we read so many articles, this I can't specifically remember which one it was but we can post it. And they had like a diagram, it was a quadrant, and on the x-axis, it was, are we being reactive or proactive and then on the y-axis, it was, are we individualistic or collective. And ultimately we want to be in that quadrant where we are collective and we are proactive, where we are trying to be ahead of these issues. We're not just like putting Band-Aids in place, putting out fires, dealing with things at a very individual problem, individualistic problem when we think of the ladder, right? Or like we just think of problems as, “oh, that person wasn't working hard enough” or “they weren't trying hard enough”, they're not using taking all their opportunities but they gave it from this systems level perspective, where we're all in this together, right? This is a collective. This is our whole society. We make these problems better. We're making our whole society better for all of us. And when we're proactive, we're reducing harm because we're not waiting until someone is drowning before giving support, especially in a system where we've created these barriers and all these problems, right? So, I just thought that was like an interesting way of kind of looking at how we can try to approach interventions that we put in place. I think also because of narratives and because of messages which we talked about in previous episodes, white communities have a really kind of automatic thought process that Black and brown communities only have negative things that happen to them. They don't have any strength or any assets because all that's in the news or all that's, you know, kind of put out there are poverty things, things about poverty and things about harm and things about trauma, right? Homelessness, right, and it’s super important we do that because there's a need that we need to repair, right? There's harm that's been done that we need to repair. But then also we miss out on like what are the assets that exist in these communities. So, I don't know I’m thinking, I know we have some interviews coming up, where we're going to be talking about some of that. And when we talk about restorative practices, to me that's an asset, it's like an Indigenous practice, right, that's something that comes from Indigenous culture, that's it. To me a major strength that American culture needs to adopt because we're just like punishment, jail, go behind occasion, racism but I don't know. What do you think? Like what are like assets or strengths that can be used, like when we think about like collective action from coming together, like…

**Miranda:** So, this may be a little, I mean, I think it applies and I don't necessarily know what you mean by assets, you know, and I think there are various types of assets…

**Noelle:** Any strength, like, any like…

**Miranda:** Joy.

**Noelle:** Yeah.

**Miranda:** You know Joy, honestly. We had interviewed Vanessa and she was – you were talking about indigenous cultures. And they talk about when harm has been done to their community- because first foundational they believe in the collective, right? That each person matters. And the person who's most marginalized in this moment or who's most oppressed or hurting the most right now - we will lift them up and we all thrive because of that. We all do better because of that. And when they're experiencing these moments of pain, they root themselves in joy, right? And so, I think that we talk about being humorous on our page, but anti-racism work and this journey, it's a lifelong journey and it can feel very overwhelming and it can be heavy. But it doesn't mean that it is. It doesn't have to be. We talk about it, it is what it is, we move forward. But we also root ourselves in these moments of joy where we experience trust and we break bread with people that we care about, and we share in the same values. And that to me is what community is about. So, I think when I hear assets, that's something that I think of well.

**Noelle:** And that's a big shift for white Americans, right? Because individualism is a big part of our culture. And I think, one just shifting that mindset. And then two; having it involve people from someone outside of your race or ethnicity, that you might need to lean on someone, who's not white. Someone a person of Color BIPOC person that we're all part of this community, right? And that is our societal like asset, that's a strength that we could have as a society but instead because, you know, we have all these internally, socially conditioned biases and everything else. We've limited ourselves from being able to experience that. So, yeah, when we think about collective impact and collective action, one of the resources that we came across I really liked because it talked about how to center equity in that work. Cause we can talk about collective impact; it's the same thing with like at work, right?

**[20:20 – 25:24]**

**Noelle:** We can all get together and try to do this work, but if we're not all looking at the right target, if we don't have the right way of framing all of this, we're still going to miss the mark.

**Miranda:** Our visions are not aligned, for sure.

**Noelle:** Yeah. So one of the… we already talked about accountability and that being a big piece of it. One of the things they also talked about, which I thought was interesting was grounding the work in data. We talked about that during our… one of our first messaging episodes a about being careful about the data that you read, right? And how are they framing these communities, like outcomes for communities or needs of communities based on the data that they're putting out. You know, is it good statistics, is it…?

**Miranda:** Yeah.

**Noelle:** I mean honestly because you can make any problem, seem like it's someone's fault, statistically. So I thought that one was interesting and…

**Miranda:** We go into focus on systems change in addition to programs and services. And so, I just think that kind of hits multiple targets at once, right? Because there's not one answer to it all, we have to change everything, which again, can seem very overwhelming but it's just breaking down and dismantling, you know, things piece by piece. So it's important to understand the larger context of how we experience racism in this country.

**Noelle:** Right. And again, was a focus of the caucus work, was those were for the Black caucus and the white caucus, like talking about those systems issues and then shifting power within the collaborative. So, you know, I mean again especially when you think of racism and spaces that we work in… especially I think that's probably; well even from like a government systems perspective. You know, like who's making the decisions, who's at the table. And, you know, are we providing the opportunities for people other than white people to come in and have power and have a say. That's one of the things I really liked about the caucus work was that -- white people are being accountable to people of Color to do this work. And like you let us know what you need and when this work is done, you know. So, I liked that and I thought it was interesting that you said, when you were talking about trust, like well I know if you're there doing the work, like I know if you're in the white caucus like doing this work that at least helps me know, you're trying to engage in this conversation, and do your own personal, like…

**Miranda:** Yeah, because that's one of the biggest things…you had asked me the other day, maybe when we were sitting on the couch talking, I think -- how do you know? And it's like any relationship where you have these experiences with someone and each little experience compiles on top of the last and either it's gonna make or break a relationship, you know. So it's in the things that you say, it's in your actions, it's how you stand up when I hear somebody say something that isn't appropriate. It's all of these things, right? And it's like we remember the… those are imprinted on us, you know? So, I think that's really how you build trust.

And number four here is listen. Listen to and act with community, right? So, again decentering yourself, it's not about you, what is the collective, what does the community need? Again it's just all so restorative, you know?

**Noelle:** Yeah. And I think what would this work look like, if we weren't doing… and maybe it's not in the caucus, right? I mean maybe it's not, I mean caucus is formalized in most of what we had read about affinity groups formalized, living room conversations a little bit less formal and maybe isn't just race-based and includes people, you know. But I think the framework of it, right? We talked about plenty of resources that people can start doing on their own, like, you know, especially our white listeners in terms of just kind of realizing where you're at in the journey and what you can do to be able to meaningfully participate in community work and working within a collective. Everything we do, even though we want to be individualistic in this society, right? It's all collective, it's all community. Some jobs you're just sitting behind, you sit behind a computer but then they're still outside…

**Miranda:** It’s all a collective, we’re all interconnected…

**Noelle:** Yeah, it’s all interconnected, right? And until we… were it the quote you read? I think it was one you read, like, you can't have trust with other people until you have self-trust, until we're working on our own insecurities and our own doubts, reflecting on our experiences and emotions, you know. We're not going to be able to show up in a way where we're trying to truly participate in community or collective.

**[25:25 – 30:21]**

**Miranda:** Well, I think that's a great point, you know, because we talk a lot about the work that white people need to do to dismantle racism. Yes. And I don't think that the work that Black people need to do is to dismantle racism.

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** But it is to work through your own insecurities and the messages that you've been told and to be able to show up in spaces where you’re your authentic self. Where I’m not code switching. And again, a lot of this also falls on being in places where we feel safe to do these things, right? And that's why the caucus work happenes, but the fact of the matter is I should be able to show up to work and not have to code switch. I should be able to wear my hair any way I want. I should just be able to be my true self, you know. And so there's a lot of dismantling that Black and brown people has to do as well for themselves really. And for their own benefit, the benefit of their community, the benefit of their people, you know.

**Noelle:** Yeah, I think a lot of its just self-reflection, right? Like where am I right now, you know? If when you said that someone had a thought of like, well, no you should wear your hair like…

**Miranda:** Straight…

**Noelle:** Straight. Reflect back on the ladder, the ‘like me’ part of the ladder; the expectation that whiteness should be the norm. And it's really just a lot about that, like even, like how in the last episode I said I caught myself, and I think I even said it in this one, like not white or whatever and it's like, you know, I mean some of these things we talked about in the second episode of our podcast; social conditioning. We've all experienced it, you know, we've all been through it, you have a different type of conditioning than I have because of…

**Miranda:** Well it shows up differently…?

**Noelle:** Yeah.

**Miranda:** But we've been…

**Noelle:** But I’m saying, we talked about your expectations of white people would be what?

**Miranda:** Oh, what do you mean…that they're all racist? Yeah, I mean okay… I’m like…

**Noelle:** That's social conditioning…

**Miranda:** Yeah, yes, yeah…

**Noelle:** You know…

**Miranda:** I mean, yes and also…

**Noelle:** For a reason but that’s how you get conditioned…

**Miranda:** Yeah, I see what you’re saying…

**Noelle:** You get conditioned by having experiences…

**Miranda:** Got it got it.

**Noelle:** That has you start creating these like, kind of like boxes that you put people in, right? And so that's what… And we talked about -- in one of the beginning episodes like you could have like 10 experiences that defy that bias you have that stereotype that you hold, right? Because we all have these stereotypes, you have a number of experiences that defy them, but then you have the one that proves it--

**Miranda:** And you're like “fuck all those other ones!”

**Noelle:** Exactly, completely forget all those other ones, right? We've all been through a series of social conditioning. And, you know, we need to work through those things. Like even as a white person, hellooo?! I mean the whole world is like you're socially conditioned to think Black people are harmful, Black people are criminals but… I mean, that's every, all the messages that get fed on a daily basis unless you're consciously like challenging those things and realizing that a lot of this stuff is just was purposefully put in place for all the reasons in our previous episodes that you should go check out to learn about systemic racism. You know, we need to just do the work because ultimately… again if we value a society, where it's multicultural and rich in diversity, then this is the work that we need to do so that people can feel safe and thrive. We've used that word thrive like a number of times.

**Miranda:** Yeah. I think it's so fitting. And I think, you know what, I want to leave folks with is really reevaluate what your values are, you know? What do you want out of this life? And that sounds so deep but also it's an important question to ask and I don't really know if a lot of people ask themselves those things. You know? What do you value in life? What do you want for the common good of people? What does power look like in this country and how do you let go of some of that and how do you show up as your authentic self? I mean, there are so many questions around this work but again it's all self-reflective and I think it's so important to look at whether you're a person of Color or you're white. Those may be different questions that you're asking yourself but all questions that need to be asked, you know?

**Noelle:** Yep. So, thank you everyone for joining us today. Really excited for the next few episodes that are coming up. We have Martin Henson from BMEN, who's going to be sharing some really interesting programming, related to Black masculinity. Vulnerability within the Black male community and Trans female community, and really great supports that exist, especially related to sexual trauma and basically topics that aren't spoken about too much. Akeem brown from the…

**[30:22 – 31:50]**

**Miranda:** Hidden Genius Project…

**Noelle:** Hidden Genius Project, really asset based program, you know, focusing on teaching young Black youth, Black males to be producers and not just consumers and use the strengths that they have to thrive in their communities. And we are also having Jamie on from Black Women Radicals**,** who's gonna come on and talk about empowerment programming for Black women and Asian collective as well. So just really, really awesome episodes that we have coming up to just focus on assets and strength and empowerment in communities that have been marginalized. So, thank you so much for joining us today and we will see you in a couple of weeks.

**Miranda:** Byeeeee.

**Noelle:** Bye.

**[Music]**

**Noelle:** Show The Unpacked Project some love and be sure to like, subscribe and review our podcast. You can also check us out on Instagram @the\_unpackedproject.

**Miranda:** And if you enjoyed today's episode, visit our website at theunpackedproject.com where you can make a donation that supports the research, production, and operating costs of this work.

**Noelle:** Shout out to all of our listeners who unpacked with us today.

**Miranda:** See you next week.

**Noelle:** Peace.