

[Intro music]

Noelle: Whaaaaat 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 story telling that we hope to inspire others to take action towards a more compassionate and equitable world.

Miranda: 'Cause honestly it kinda sucks here sometimes.

Noelle: For real, we can do better people.

Miranda: Alright, let's start unpacking.

[Music plays]

Miranda: We're recording today's episode long before you'll hear it. It's September 27th, and the verdict for Breonna Taylor's murder was released this week. Unfortunately, it wasn't surprising, upsetting, disturbing, infuriating, yes. But the US has embedded systemic racism into the very foundation of our country, beginning with enslavement, and we continue to see the deliberate aftermath nearly 160 years later. It is our intention to continue working towards building a more just and compassionate world for all but today for Breonna. So we felt it only right to dedicate today's show to her, and we'd like to start with a moment of silence in honor of her life, because it mattered and it still does.

Noelle: Ironically we had planned to do this episode already, so it makes this topic even more timely coming right off of the sadly predictable Breonna Taylor ruling. We hope that today's episode will help everyone understand the roots of oppression and inequality with more clarity. Today, we explore how America's systems are Not a GO, the origin and history of systemic racism, and specifically how our biases which we spoke about last week, interact with systems and law to perpetuate the cycle. But for starters, something a little different today.

Noelle: I bring you "Racism, a Short Story"

[reciting of poem begins]

Miranda: Slavery. America's original sin. You came to kidnap us-stole us from our land, we were enslaved and shipped across seas in the most horrific conditions.

Noelle: But you were less than human. Our science and religion proved our White superiority, so we beat you and built our wealth off of you.

Miranda: Our women were raped and forced to breed, our children were born into bondage.

Noelle: But your work was justified and necessary. Plantations grew, our pockets got fatter...

Miranda: And then the Union won the war! Reconstruction, reconstruction, reconstruction. Our men became citizens, they voted, held office...

Noelle: You thought you had rights? That was short lived. Voting required the ability to read, guarantees to fair trial weren't guaranteed, the KKK formed to intimidate you and reinforce White supremacy

Miranda: We thought we were free...

Noelle: But we burned your homes and took your land and hung your bodies from trees.

Miranda: Terror lynchings. To fear us into submission.

Noelle: We ratified the 13th Amendment-prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude, unless you were convicted of a crime.

Miranda: Black Codes turned into Jim Crows-just slavery by a different name.

Don't stand outside of a building while Black, don't be homeless and Black, don't carry a weapon while Black and make sure you have proof of employment while Black...or else they'll still own you in prison.

Noelle: Convict Leasing. To return Black people to chains

Miranda: And for the first time in U.S. history, there were more Black prisoners than White

Noelle: All of whom could be leased for profit. For OUR profit. We don't want you here, separate but equal is the best that we'd give-separate schools, separate jails, separate places to live

Miranda: And even after Desegregation, the New Deal had already sectioned off neighborhoods on the map that were "more desirable" so that fake Fair Housing act did nothing for us.

Noelle: But it did for us...we took your impoverished neighborhoods and dropped crack cocaine in the 80's, signed the crime bill in the 90's

Miranda: And saw our prisons grow, and grow, and grow.

Noelle: If our economy isn't America's land and crops, it will be the American Black body.

Miranda: And still today we must bear this weight yet are told to resist nothing, because slavery in America hasn't ended, it just evolved.

[reciting of poem ends]

Noelle: And that's how we got here. This American crisis we're in isn't new, and for me I think-I'm always wondering how? How did this and how does this continue to work? I mean, it was so well laid out that when the Nazis were researching ways to keep the Aryan race pure and institutionalize racism in Germany, where did they turn? To the US? We had already perfected this system and the Nazis admired it, they studied it, and they replicated it. And we want to call them out for their inhumanity in Germany, and really, they just copied what we were already doing.

Miranda: I guess America is good at something. From a historical standpoint though, if we bring it way back, there were very specific ideas that were used to justify enslavement, and not just in America either

Noelle-No, not at all. The slave trade was world-wide. So, racist ideas under the veil of a bunch of made up justifications, and this is really an important piece because it sets the stage for that continued justification of Black oppression for centuries. But as we get into systemic racism, which is very American, what we're really talking about is that continued evolution of governmental systems that maintain oppression in the modern world.

Miranda: Yea, definitely. Look, at the root of it during slavery, White people needed to make sure they kept money and power, and they needed to keep enslaved people from revolting. Then long after slavery White people wanted to maintain that power and that money and continue to build off of it, so in order to do that, guess what...Black people needed to stay oppressed. Who would have thought?

N- I mean, we've laid out what almost sounds like the cliff notes version of "how to build the foundation of oppression for dummies," but let's really dive into the intentionality that has caused this system to continue working. It's really all about the way it was designed.

So I want to talk about two important theories, and hold on to your seats if you've never heard these before cuz when I learned them, it just blew my mind. They're going to sound crazy, well at least they sound crazy to me, but this crap really worked. So one of the theories was climate theory, and climate theory was the idea that the heat of the continent made Africans inferior. That if they lived in cooler temperatures they could become White essentially. But then curse theory came when people realized, uh oh, there's people living in freezing cold places in the North like Canada and they're also dark. In fact, they're darker than people that were living further South than them so it couldn't have been climate that made darker people inferior, so instead it must just be that Africans are cursed.

Miranda: What in the actual fuck? I've never heard of this in my 35 years of living!

Noelle: Yes, climate theory and curse theory. Ummm, yea. This is really how people were justifying slave trade in the beginning. And how do we make people cursed and then create meaning for things that we can't prove?

Miranda: Let me take a guess, probably the Bible.

Noelle: Yup, you would be correct. Exactly. So basically the short version from the story that they used in the Bible is a story of Ham, who's Noah's son. And Ham has sex on the Ark, which he wasn't supposed to do. So God wills that Ham's children will be dark and disgusting, and the world will see them as trouble. And this curse theory is what was eventually used to justify American slavery for centuries. That Black people were bad and enslavement was viewed as a way to make them safe and civilized, so essentially Africans were being saved because they were descendants of the story of Ham and they were cursed.

Miranda: And they were saved by none other than White saviors, right? Which is something we still see today.

Noelle: Yeah, I mean when slavery came to America, the Puritans were there and they were ready for it. And they already had this idea that they were better than everyone, right? Better than Native Americans, basically better than anyone who wasn't Puritan, but particularly Africans. So at this time our economy was land and you had the one set of people that were the farmers and worked on the land, and then you had a set of people that were Christians, and these are the two sets of people that you had. And for those whose economy was land, whatever crop you could grow on it was how you made your money, so when the first slave ship showed up 1619- cha-ching! So the enslaved population grows and in order to work the land, grow more crops, make more money, they started fearing revolt too, especially when those that were enslaved in Haiti revolted and won during the French Revolution. And so that fear became a reality for slave owners here in America because as word made its way to America, more Black people started running away than ever before because they were empowered by hearing that the slaves in Haiti had won and were free.

Miranda: Yeah, it's what brought the movement to what's known as the Assimilationist era. Not everyone supported slavery, right? So abolitionists or the folks that wanted to abolish or end slavery were telling newly freed black folks to follow this White code of assimilation, right? Go to church, learn proper English, get married, basically blend. Essentially if you could act more White then you'd be able to earn your right to humanness. To humanness. It's this idea that continues to permeate our society today-act white to be accepted, assimilate for acceptance.

Noelle: Right, and as time goes on, the assimilationists and the abolitionist, although different in their beliefs, they were fighting to end slavery. And anti slavery information made its way around through publishing, literally flyers, and it scared the crap out of White politicians and scholars who were pro slavery. Cause this was business for them you know, and they needed people to continue to believe in that sub humanness of that you were literally a different species in order to keep that going. And So what do we do? What do we turn to when we need to keep the power?

Miranda: Instill fear and hate in people.

Noelle: Yeah, unfortunately yes. That's what happened. So things like pseudoscience, used to just spread propaganda that White people had bigger skulls and were smarter. And then we just continue to forbid education for enslaved people so we can actually make that seem true. Things like free Blacks were insane and enslaved Blacks were sane, biracial people had shorter lifespans than Whites. I mean, anything that they could say to continue to preach that slavery was good, it's the will of the God, it's a means to Salvation, and anything to make Black people, especially freed Black people, seem subhuman and subpar.

Miranda: Yeah yeah, and so much so that the dehumanization of Black people made its way right into the document that framed America. So in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was formed, stating all men, supposedly, are created equal. But then, who did that really include? And when we have the Constitution, House and Senate being created, the South wanting more representation, right? Well, guess what...Southern states had larger populations of Black people, considering that they were the largest geographical region to enslave people, by default, and then they wanted to count them. So we steal you from your land, we enslave you, and now, well, because we want more representation, we're going to count you as humans even though we tell you you're not human. I'm sure the debate went something like this-do slaves count as people to get more representation? Well, that's not fair to the North, but plus, they're not human, so we can't do that. How about we count them as 3/5 of human? Great idea, right? So in 1787 the three fifths compromise was born.

Noelle: It's just, it's all so crazy. And you know, we can keep going through history but let's just let's go to the Civil War. I think most of us know the basics of this era. You know the South seceded from the North and the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. And just to be clear about all of this, this wasn't based on humanity and ending slavery. It was still about politics, and money, and land. Even with slavery ending, no one wanted equality for Black people. That's not what that was about. But as Black people began freeing themselves by crossing union lines, really a new period of life in the North began. And although they were chasing freedom, these ingrained racist beliefs that they were savage and less human, those remain. Those don't just go away. And in the search for equality comes the true test of this country-freedom for who? How much freedom are we actually talking about?

Miranda: Well, I think as history evolves what do we see? At every turn, at every corner of a place for equality come barriers.

Noelle: Right.

Miranda: There were Black codes which were created as a direct state loophole to still enslave people. You know, what jobs could they hold, how much could they make at said job, and so on. So as more Black people started moving to cities, White city dwellers became appalled that Blacks were moving closer to them. And then Jim Crow laws were born which were created to legalize racial segregation, and then the KKK was also allowed to destroy Black lives at any cost in order to uphold these codes and laws. So freed Black people started creating their own communities, their own colleges, their own economic systems, just to have some of them burned to the ground. To have the KKK come and burn these systems to the ground.

Noelle: And instead of continuing through all the historical details of the next decades, there's really just a principle that remains, and one that was ever present. It weaves its way through all aspects of history, and basically, it's that whenever Black people start gaining some power, or some land, or some education, or some rights to participate in democracy, what happens? More White privileges, more racist rhetoric, more legal barriers, more violence against the Black community, just to continue Black oppression and maintain the whiteness of America. You know, maintain the power and maintain the systems that have worked for very specific groups of people.

Miranda: Right. And even as other groups of immigrants came, the choice was clearly laid out for them-do whatever you need to do to join the White elite and distance yourself as much as possible from the bottom class of Black Americans, right? Change your names, learn Black stereotypes, join in on the violence. Work your way to whiteness within the system.

Noelle: Yeah, I mean, America really took shit to a whole other level.

Miranda: For real.

Noelle: Seriously. I mean, to maintain racial purity, thinking not allowing interracial marriages, anyone who had a drop, you know the one drop rule, really anything that they could do to try to maintain that whiteness and keep power. And this is a system that people are still trying to maintain. You know, we talk about that this has evolved, right? It might not look exactly like it did all those years ago, but it's still here and all these years later we live with the remnants of slavery and there is continued oppression that still exists.

Miranda: Yeah, exactly. So it's evolved through the home buying market, and our education, criminal justice, and voting systems. I'm sure plenty of others too we could talk about, right? We just don't have time for all of that today. But they've all been set up in ways to continually oppress Blacks. We already know who owns all the land in America-historically, White people-and if land and real estate are the best predictors of long-term wealth, well, with no land comes no investments for your future generations. So with White only real estate contracts and housing segregation, Black people continued to lose on the opportunity for wealth while Whites gained. And then we saw the gap continued to grow until the Supreme Court allowed for an open housing market.

Yeah and I mean, with that White people see Black people moving into the cities and it's like-oh no, these dangerous Black people are coming, right? This group of people, they're subhuman and they're savage, and they're less than- they are coming! And so the White people go. So we enter White flight. If anybody has heard the term "White flight", that's what this is. It's Black people being able to come in and purchase some land and property, and White people leaving because they were coming in. And in fact, in some areas of the country when developers wanted to purchase areas they would bus Black people in, under the guise that the Black people thought they were going to actually be able to buy some property, but this was really just to scare White people out. And so two things happen here-for one, White people leaving inner cities also mean that businesses leave, resources leave, and then poverty centers form. And two-Black people were systematically locked out of those suburbs where White people were moving. There were housing practices such as redlining where the federal government and mortgage lenders would literally draw a red line, on a map, around neighborhoods that they would not invest in.

Miranda: Right. And of course it was all based off of race. And you know, we still see these neighborhoods today. They're under-resourced, they're food deserts, all of those things.

Noelle: Yeah, I mean here we go again-Black inner city neighborhoods, most likely to be redlined, and then lenders would give loans to lower income Whites but NOT to middle or upper income Black families. So as Whites are gaining more property and more value in the suburbs, Black families and migrants are limited to the inner city housing projects and there's a limited internal economy in those inner cities. And the resource structures, they leave. So they're completely underfunded and it's a cycle that continues today, even with segregation in our neighborhoods now.

Miranda: I mean, it's gentrification for that matter. it's literally White people displacing communities of color. Alright, So what do we know about housing and income today? Let's just share a little bit about that because I think the data is important as well, some of this factual stuff, right? So we know that the current 30 percentage point gap between Black and White homeownership is larger today than it was in 1968 when housing discrimination was legal. OK??

Noelle: Right?

Miranda: We also know that homeownership is lower for Black college graduates than for White high school dropouts. We know the Black borrowers are less likely to meet the traditional credit standards necessary to qualify for a mortgage, because how do you build credit if you can't get credit?

Noelle: Yeah, and while families of color will soon make up a majority of the population, they are still behind Whites in building wealth. So in 1963, the average wealth of White families was \$121,000 higher than the average wealth of non White families, and by 2016 average wealth of white families was over \$700,000 higher than the average wealth of Black families.

Miranda: That shit is ridiculous.

Noelle: Yeah, right?

Miranda: Like, how do you catch up? So Black families on average have less wealth and fewer private resources so they're more likely to turn to loans to finance their education. So on average, they've carried more student loan debt than White families. And more debt, less homeownership, lower wages for Black generations vs. less debt, more homeownership, higher wages for White generations.

Noelle: Yeah, I mean...the cycle continues right? It goes on and on. With all of this, we still hear-well, education is the key to a wealthy future. You know, you go to school, get an education, go to college, you'll get a good job, and then you've made it, right? This American dream. And, I think we've already covered the systematic discriminatory housing practices even when people are educated, right? We just spoke about the fact that a White high school dropout is getting loans at higher rates than someone Black who went to college. Well, let's talk more about our education system.

Miranda: OK, well we all know Brown versus the Board of Education, which was really inherently racist for starters. The latest figures from the National Center for Educational Statistics show that nationwide, about 3/4 of both African Americans and Hispanic young people, compared to about 1/3 white students attend schools where most of their classmates qualify as low income, and that's huge. When we look at the racial achievement gap, this concentrated poverty, which

shows that they're overrepresented in, is tightly correlated with gaps in educational achievement.

Noelle: Yeah, I mean we're living in a time period of a shrinking middle class essentially. We have this formation of poor neighborhoods or affluent neighborhoods, and we really are losing that middle class that we used to have 30-40, well really more than that, 40-50 years ago. And we'd be remissed to think that there aren't social and economic benefits that flow into affluent schools. Obviously, the absence of those benefits in schools with concentrated poverty-and it's a cycle that perpetuates, with less local resources, more difficulty attracting quality teachers, fewer parents with college degrees, working class families who can't come and volunteer in the school or donate resources to the school, you know? And then aside from all that, we have bias and inequitable policies.

Miranda: Right? So again, with all of that, what do we know? And let's keep in mind some of what we learned about bias from our last episode-and also as a side note-when we get into this data, everything that we share or reference in our episodes can be found in our show notes on our website. So if you want to know more, definitely go check that out. So national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal study found Black students were 54% less likely than White students to be recommended for gifted education programs after adjusting for factors such as students standardized test scores, but black students were three times more likely to be referred for the programs if their teacher was Black rather than White. ([Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory](#), 2016)

Noelle: Yeah, and another study reported that when Black and White teachers evaluate the same Black student, White teachers are 12% less likely to predict the student will finish high school and 30% less likely to predict that the student will graduate from college.

([Economics of Education Review](#), 2016)

Miranda: And that's a huge problem, right? We're clearly not setting our kids up for success. In a field of predominantly White educators, their bias has them believing their Black students aren't as smart as their White counterparts, or that they won't even graduate to begin with. And again, we talk about this perpetuation of a cycle in this so intentional. Data from the US Department of Education shows that from 2013-2017 nationwide, 77.8% of Black students who entered 9th grade in the fall of 2013 versus 88.6% of White students actually graduated. That's a pretty big gap.

Noelle: It is. And you know, this varies by state too. So take somewhere like Wisconsin, they had the largest racial gap in graduation rates, 25.7 percentage point difference with 92.7% of White students graduating versus 67% of black students, and there were no states where the Black graduation rate exceeded the White rate. The other thing, it makes me think from our last episode 2 when we were talking about bias, is going back to some of those statistics about the White teachers not thinking that their students are even going to graduate. When we think about our biases, we know that they impact our behavior. That's what we talked about last episode, right? We know that impacts our actions, what we're thinking, even if it's subconsciously, so I just think, how are we educating our students if we're not even expecting them to graduate?

Miranda: Right?

Noelle: What's the quality of education?

Miranda: Yeah. What standard do you hold them to? What are your expectations of them? Yeah, and you and I both worked in schools in different capacities, but we've seen it. And I've worked in different communities as well. I mean, even for you, right? You have a few different schools, right? Some Title 1 schools-

Noelle: Primarily Title 1 schools my whole career.

Miranda: You know, it's just...it's heartbreaking. But OK, so we have these biases right? And we know that they contribute to these alarming rates that we talk about, but there's also concentrated poverty, local resources-or lack of local resources and generational wealth. Also, part of the unfortunate reality for Black students, which you and I are aware of, is this excessive discipline that happens. The Department of Ed's Office of Civil Rights shared that Black K-12 Students are 3.8 times as likely as their White peers to receive one or more out of school suspensions. People's minds might want to think-well maybe the Black students are causing more problems, or they're just getting into trouble more, they're coming from troubled homes. Whatever excuses people want to make in their heads, but no, sorry folks, that's just not the case. A variety of studies have found, and proven, that even after taking achievement, socioeconomic status, self reported behavior and teacher reported behavior into account-Black students are still punished more frequently and more severely.

Noelle: Yeah, and students who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school, have run-ins with the juvenile justice system, and it's a pattern that's so well documented that it's earned its own term. And the term for that is the school to prison pipeline. And given the disproportionate suspensions that we also see in pre K with students as young as three, it can also be termed the cradle to prison pipeline.

Miranda: What the hell is a 3 year old doing that they should be suspended for? I'm like what? What?

Noelle: Yeah, so they're already becoming disengaged in school. They're already spending less time in their educational settings. They're already learning that they're not wanted there. So again, what are we ingraining? What kind of beliefs do we have if we're already thinking when we think about our biases, right? Black people are more dangerous. There's all these biases that have historically come down on us, and then we're just assuming. When we look at the same behavior, really a lot of that research talks about how a Black student and a White student can do the same thing-

Miranda: Exact same. Yup.

Noelle: And the black student gets the harsher sentence. Like you said, as young as 3. I mean, what's really happening here?

Miranda: I know. So look, I just want to take it back for a second 'cause in relation to what you're saying, just something to know. So after slavery, "ended", Black codes were enforced to basically re-enslave so the South could continue to have free labor, and there's a direct correlation with our current criminal justice system and our schools. It's not a mistake. We have the highest documented incarceration rates in the world. The WORLD! And despite only making up about 5% of the global population, the US has nearly 25% of the world's prison population. And prisoners don't have to be paid for their labor.

Noelle: Yeah, it's a business you know? And what we really want to unpack within this mass incarceration system is, yet again, how this affects communities of color at much higher rates than White communities. Historically we know that in the 1980s there were differences in sentencing for crack versus Cocaine-the war on drugs. Crack was associated with Black people, it was cheaper so it was primarily in the Black communities, purposefully put there, and Cocaine was associated with White people. It was more expensive and it was a more elite drug.

Miranda: Yeah. Well it's like the same shit now. We talk about the legalization of marijuana and there's still offenders that are in prison and you have White folks making a shit ton of money off of these companies. It's ridiculous.

Noelle: Yeah, it's just same song ,different tune you know? Under the sentencing disparity with crack Cocaine, distribution of just 5 grams of crack carried a minimum five year federal prison sentence while distribution of 500 grams of Cocaine carried the same five year mandatory minimum sentence. So they were certain ratios that they looked at with these laws-that was 100 to 1 ratio for crack Cocaine-and as law enforcement efforts started focusing on crack arrests, and really, you know, what communities are we talking about? Where the crack is. Our prison became filled with members of the Black community. So then the Fair Sentencing Act eliminated the five year minimum for just simple crack Cocaine possession and also reduced the ratio from 100:1, so that 500:5-to 18:1. Which is still ridiculous. It really should be a 1:1 ratio, whether you have 5 grams of crack, 5 grams Cocaine, it should be the same.

But this didn't even come into existence until 2010. And like I said, it's an improvement but it's still arbitrary and just unjust. And so finally at the end of 2018-so you have to think, there's all these people sitting in prison who were the victims of this law-so finally the First Step Act was signed into law which allowed for retroactive changes to sentences that existed prior to the Fair Sentencing Act.

Miranda: Which is still ridiculous, right? So we say it's a step towards progress, but I call bullshit, it's still a fucking joke. It's just a drop to fix our sea of oppression because we still all know that 1 out of every 3 Black boys born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime. And 1 of every 6 Latinx boys compared to just 1 of every 17 White boys.

Noelle: Yeah, Black people comprise 13% of the US population and are documented by the US government to use drugs at the same rates of people of other races, yet Black people make up 29% of those arrested for drug law violations-nearly 40% of those incarcerated in state or federal prisons for drug law violations. And these are clearly disproportionate numbers. And to be even further clear about this, drug charges are almost 6 times that of Whites for Black people.

Miranda: I just can't Noooooo!!!!!!

Noelle: It doesn't make any sense. I mean-the word timeout, it doesn't make any sense. But I'm like, this does make sense, right? But this is intentional, this is what our system was intended to do.

Miranda: That is true. And so, what's crazy is that there are people that want to-that wanted to and still want to-intentionally keep this power, and keep this money, and oppress Black people. What's really crazy is that we've seen the rate of violent crimes in the United States dropped by about 20% since 1991, while the number of people in prison or jail has risen by 50%. So I mean, that right there. If African Americans and Hispanics were incarcerated at the same rates as Whites, prison and jail populations would have declined by almost 40%.

Noelle: And with those crazy disproportionate rates, think about what the death penalty can do

Miranda: It's scary

Noelle: to a population of people. And with Black people representing, again, only 13% of the general population-and we keep repeating that because that's important, 'cause like the crux of disproportionality, right? You're only 13% our entire population, yet 35% of the individuals executed under the death penalty within the last 40 years have been Black.

Miranda: Yea. So all these percentages should be matching up, right? The percentages of people on death row or killed by the death penalty should match up to prison populations of race, and that's just not happening.

Noelle: And your incarceration rates should also be proportionate. How are you only 13% the population and so over represented in our jails? This doesn't make sense.

Miranda: And then think, after release nearly 75% formerly incarcerated people are still unemployed. A lack of stable employment also increases likelihood than an individual return to jail or prison, right? In fact, researchers found that joblessness is the single most important predictor of recidivism. And then there's these laws in place that if you've been imprisoned, that you can't be employed at certain jobs. So now we go back to Black codes where you could only make a certain amount of money and only do a certain type of job. And it's the same thing.

Noelle: Yeah, well, I mean the other thing it makes me think of is how many people are missing from a community?

Miranda: Exactly, yes.

Noelle: You know, and when we have all of these black men in particular missing from a community, that's lost resources, lost people in your community that are there or are represented in a light where they can actually be citizens just like everyone else. So it's just such a loss. And how do we change all this? Well, voting right?

Noelle: Like everyone says, vote!

Miranda: Ideally.

Noelle: Ok honestly, yes. Please go vote, it is important. And there's a quote from Common that-

Miranda: Really Noelle!!! No there isn't!?

Noelle: I love Common ok, and it's such a good quote-"Well if your vote didn't matter they wouldn't be trying so hard to keep you from voting." So vote because it's true. But here's the systemic part and why is it so important- the 15th amendment made black voting legal, but there were always loopholes. So things like poll taxes, literacy tests, White only primaries, voter intimidation, violence at the polls, it all made voting impossible. An although the Voting Rights Act of 1965 abolished these practices, we still continue to have voting barriers today.

Miranda: Yeah, there was that case in 2013 where the Supreme Court struck down that rule that the Justice Department needed to clear any voting law changes, right?

Noelle: Yeah, so now states that previously had to get clearance to make changes are able to enact laws that make it harder to cast a ballot, like restricting early voting, reducing polling places which we hear of all the time, and then enacting restrictions like voter ID's or the felony tax rules.

Miranda: Well yea, that was Amendment 4 here in Florida. So basically you can't, well from what I know-you can't be on probation and all fines and fees must be paid in addition to a handful of other things, right? But when we think of the inequities within the wage gaps that we're seeing, the likelihood to be imprisoned for someone Black and the opportunity to get a job afterwards, the ability to pay fines and fees are all barriers. You're only making so much money, you most likely don't have a job, how are you going to pay? You can't pay, so you can't vote.

Noelle: And again, this is from my memory, but we had voted on allowing felons to be able to vote. I passed right?

Miranda: Uh huh.

Noelle: Then just recently, it was like someone sat back and was like wait a second.

Miranda: No, no, no-shit's about to get real.

Noelle: No, no no! What could we do to stop this from happening? Oh I know, just make them pay their fines. They're not going to have all that money. So like we said this earlier, at every turn, at every corner at any point when we're giving it back-'cause it's just and fair to do that-someone slaps a barrier down. And it's just barrier after barrier after barrier. So we hope that you understand now when people say systemic racism this is what they mean.

Miranda: Alright, well in addition to these systems there's biases, right? We touched on that a little bit, this messaging and rhetoric used historically to keep these systems going. It still exists. It exists in headlines and media, there's manipulation within the media and it shows Black people are more dangerous and therefore they're more deserving of these harsher sentences and the death penalty, which affects us all.

Noelle: Yeah, and I would argue that these laws and oppressed systems would dissolve if we just woke up and didn't buy it anymore. I think we said this in the last episode or maybe it was the first one—we are supposed to get better as humans, right? We are supposed to evolve. Curse theory, climate theory, these things should sound ridiculous, right? We should be able to look back on these things, learn from our history, and reflect how these things happened that were completely barbaric and inhumane, and we should be able to look at that and be honest about our biases that have formed from living within this racist system. And we talked about the hierarchy that is formed. And we need to stand up to this. We need to stand up to this just arbitrary system that's remained, and I think if we did, it could end. But it takes people looking at it and wanting fairness and wanting equity and wanting justice in order for it to end.

Miranda: And to know that letting go of some of your power causes everyone else to rise as well, right? And we all get better as humans, as a nation, as a society you know? But we still have individuals that believe that everyone has just a fair of a chance to make it. You know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But some people don't even have bootstraps and some people don't even know what those are because their education is shit u know, like, right? So it's just not true. So, deep breath everyone! Today was a lot. I think we covered a lot, but the historical context of systemic racism is so important to understand because we can never know where we're going if we don't know what we've come from. So we hope that you've gained a deeper understanding about the context and intentionality of systemic oppression, how it's permeated our schools our housing market, our prisons our voting system, and the lasting effects it's had and will continue to have on Black children, Black men, Black women and the Black family unit.

Noelle: And I think when people hear the term white privilege, which I think is difficult—well, it is difficult, I'm not going to say maybe—for White people to accept in a lot of circumstances. Like you said, the pull yourself up by the bootstraps straps mentality, that if you just work hard, we worked hard too. And no one's saying you aren't out there working hard, but what we are saying is that the system's been rigged and if you didn't hear that or learn that from today's episode...maybe go back and listen again.

Miranda: Yea please go back and listen, and go to our website, check out some resources or something.

Noelle: Continue to read, continue to educate yourself, because that's really what we're talking about with White privilege. We're talking about this system that was very purposefully set up on the backs of Black people for your prosperity. And at every turn you gain more wealth and you

gained better education and you gain more employment, and they didn't. Purposefully. Not because they weren't hard workers or because they're not smart enough, because it was purposeful. And like we said, we still see these barriers today. They're just packaged differently. So thank you for joining us today, please join us next week for Equity Starts Early. We're going to examine the disparities within our early childhood education system, and really the need for policy reform-again, like we were talking about-as early as pre K. And we're actually going to have our guest on, it's going to be our first guest so I'm super excited about this, Dr. Ashley Christine Williams. She is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment through UC Berkeley. So thank you for joining us today, please join us next week.

[Outro music plays]

Miranda: The Unpacked Project is produced by Vicky Lee. Branding and Marketing by Raquel Avalos.

Noelle: Show us some love and be sure to like, subscribe and review our podcast. And to stay connected and up-to-date, follow us on Instagram at the_unpacked project.

Miranda: Shout out to all of our listeners who unpacked with us today, we'll see you next week.

Noelle: Peace!

Miranda: Ayye byeeeee

Additional resources and references from today's show:

1. [Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#)
2. [Redlining](#)
3. [Analysis: The Promise and Pitfalls of the 15th Amendment Over 150 Years](#)
4. [These Five Facts Reveal the Current Crisis in Black Homeownership](#)
5. [Nine Charts About Wealth Inequality in America](#)
6. [Inequality at School](#)
7. [The Drug War, Mass Incarceration, and Race](#)
8. [The Concentration of Poverty in American Schools](#)