

[00:01 – 05:00]

[Music]

**Noelle:** What uuuup!

**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:** We're baaaaack! Noelle and I are so excited to be here for season two with all of you. There's been so much that's occurred over the past couple months while we were away. There was an election like none of us have seen before. A new president, thank goodness. And then, there was the insurrection at the Capitol, which exposed what many of us already knew, that white supremacy is still very much alive and strong in this country.

**Noelle:** Yeah. Originally, when we started this podcast, we had a vision of taking all things social justice into account and talking about all those different topics, and actually our plans for season two were to start moving into gender and sexuality-based equity and justice work, but when that capital riot occurred and we realized there's still so much more that needs to be unpacked in terms of violent extremism in America, we just figured we need to continue doing this work for now. You know, what we usually see as a nation is hype around these situations like this and then ultimately, silence. And I think back to season--the season one episode where we were doing the one word activity and my word was 'silence' and that still just really rings true today, particularly in response to these two types of national events, you know, when white people incite

violence or when people of Color are systematically victimized and oppressed. And so, you know, there's this tendency, there's this comfort in just forgetting and not talking about it. And so, you know, we even had national leaders, right? Calling for us to just move on for the sake of unity and we just... we call bullshit on that.

**Miranda:** Yeah, definitely, right. And for that very reason, we're going to take a trip back in time during today's episode. And what struck us as most alarming is that this doesn't sound much different than the events that are unfolding today. We think it's important not to forget and so, in the process of not forgetting, we want to pay special attention to how we actually remember. So, Dr. Barner Hess talks about the ethics of memory, which is the oughtness of remembering and the justice of drawing out the exemplary significance of past events. So, that's what we're here to do today, to unpack, right, as our name is, the significance of what happened at the Capitol and to not succumb to forgetting.

**Noelle:** Yeah, I mean, so how do we remember, right? History is experienced personally but it's also constructed and so, there's this whole idea of whitewashing history that's nothing new. We talked a little bit during season one but there's all this... also this tendency I think for white people to be both the victims and the saviors in many narratives. And so, you know, when we talk about slavery, America's original sin, as you might hear it referred to, you know, it's as if we are accepting our past, but what isn't really correctly spoken about and remembered is how every failed attempt at controlling that racial divide leads to more savvy ways of accomplishing what slavery and black codes tried to do; white domination.

**Miranda:** Yeah. So, enter whitelash. So, there's a CNN commentator, Van Jones, if you're familiar, who came up with the term 'whitelash' to describe why he felt Americans elected Donald Trump as President. This term should also trigger us to remember our undeniable past though, that anytime there's a significant racial progress in America, it's inevitably followed by white backlash or whitelash, which stems from this need to maintain this white political power and domination in this country which is, you know, the same as black codes as you spoke of. And then we have reconstruction in the 19th century which was followed by a century, a whole century of Jim Crow, and then the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s which was followed by President Ronald Reagan, the criminalization of Black people and the rise of the religious alt-right and then in the early 2000s, we saw the election of Obama, a Black president, followed by the election of a white supremacist, sociopath for that matter, who have these masses of Americans chanting 'make America great again'.

**Noelle:** Yeah. I mean, the truth is that in 2016, when we look back at the numbers, 58 percent of white Americans voted for Trump and he held a wide majority for people that were 45 years and older.

[05:01 – 10:03]

**Noelle:** So, the generations of people who lived through the civil rights era and the Reagan era and who remembered very specifically what it meant when Trump was saying 'make America great again', you know, and in 2020, white older people yet again showed up for Trump. And so, even when this generation eventually ages out of existence, you know, there's still a large percentage of younger uneducated white people and self-identified Christians in a lot of cases, who stand behind the rhetoric which is fueled by hate and infiltrated by extremism.

**Miranda:** Yeah. Well, and then you also have, you know, these folks that are kind of on the fringes, right? And psychologically, they know that they can target them and especially with social media, folks may be taking in information that they don't fully realize is coming from the alt-right but they're susceptible to listening to it more, right? Maybe they don't really have an identity that's been formed or they feel alone in this world or their values in some ways align and those are folks that they can tap into. And they have. You know, we will talk about the Proud Boys later but I really feel like the insurrection was a lot of that to kind of get people to come and so... And so, there's some comfort in knowing that Trump lost a popular vote twice but there's still this large population of white America that did vote for him and that's worrisome. And worrisome may be in an underestimation. Like, it's terrifying, right? So, in *White Rage*, Carol Anderson quotes sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom who stated 'whiteness defends itself against change, against progress, against hope, against black dignity, against Black lives, against reason, against truth, against facts, against native claims and against its own laws and customs'. And I'd add-because they can.

**Noelle:** Right. Right. And we talked about white privilege, you know, a lot during season one and kind of weaved its way in and out of many episodes and I think it's super relevant now as we're talking about white supremacy and whitelash, like you said, you know--because you can. Because you've got these systems that are created to support you and give you power, and there's going to be a lot of defense of that, right? So, just how far will they go to defend themselves? And I think when we see people of Color defend themselves, it doesn't... it's like, again, what's that narrative for that, right? We talk about the language that you hear in the media, the rioting and calling attention to... even though a small majority of Black Lives Matter protests were dangerous in any way, that's what gets attention called to it in the media and then we have this insurrection at the Capitol of all these white supremacist groups coming and essentially raging on our

government and we talked about it and I feel like now it's gone. You know, so I think it's exactly what we're seeing. You know, these white nationalists feeling the power and control slipping away. And literally, I mean when you watch those videos, like, just being allowed to enter the nation's capital that plans to kidnap or kill members of our government in the name of Donald Trump, even though right now we have this whole ridiculous, you know, thing going on where we're trying to prove that and seemingly, people still don't want to face the reality. I saw... I saw, it was like, a tweet. I forget the name of the actor, Patton Oswalt I think, and he was like, 'wow, this is really confusing, all these people waving Trump flags up at the Capitol, who could they have been doing this in name of?' But like, just as Johnson after Lincoln, you know, white extremists supported by having their guy in the White House and so, white people are... they're used to getting their way. I mean, you know, they're used to being in power, they're used to being able to get what they want and I 100 percent think that they thought that would work.

**Miranda:** Oh, of course they did, you know. I mean our country was founded on these principles, right? Having laws in place that support white supremacy. And, you know, we'd spoken a lot about bias and systemic racism during season one and we see so many levels of both at play throughout the insurrection and the aftermath, right? So, first of all, there's reports about how it was publicly being planned on Reddit, Facebook, you know, on social media, there was the obvious call to action by Trump himself and then how was any of this not stopped and I mean, that's a rhetorical question, right? Because we know the answer, you know. Why weren't there hundreds of armed military guards on the steps of the Capitol, protecting our government as they were during BLM protests, just like you spoke of earlier? Why is hardly anyone... why was hardly anyone arrested as they were during the protest, BLM protest as well, why were they treated so nicely, why weren't there rubber bullets, why wasn't there tear gas, pepper spray.

[10:04 – 15:03]

**Miranda:** And not that we want those things, you know what I mean? But they're clearly two different stories here, you know, there are two different experiences, right? So, just so many questions, you know, and after the fact, the media tiptoes around saying what it actually was, it was domestic terrorism, you know. And I haven't heard enough people say that, you know, to call out what it clearly is, right? And so, for that very reason, we're going to be exploring extremism this season. And I think kind of funny because we were like, we don't want to do anything that's too heavy, we want to talk about information that's like, easily digestible and, you know, this can really turn people away from the podcast but we also need to call it what it is and we need to call it out and we need to talk about it. So, we'll be exploring extremism this season. Extremism in the media, military, political and police infiltration, homegrown terrorism, you know, things like that.

Because although Trump is out, all of those people who stormed the Capitol and their supporters who backed them but stayed at home, they're still out there. And they've been there since the abolishment of slavery, riding this wave of racial resentment and maintaining their white power at all costs, so...

**Noelle:** Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, it's necessary to have these conversation. We talk in general, right? That we're here to have these crucial conversations, but really around extremism to learn to recognize it, call it out so that we can be prepared in overcoming the power of it and because, even if not all of the slice of white America is extremist, and they're not, right? Like, we know this is a small majority of people that are, but it's again, it goes back to like, what you were saying earlier, of being able to be targeted, right? If you're not paying attention to messaging, if you're not aware of your own biases that we talked about during season one, if you're not paying attention and also if you're silent, so maybe you're not, you know, out there supporting extremist views or you think what happened at the Capitol was wrong but if you're not speaking out against the white supremacist system that we're still all functioning within, then you're implicitly supporting the rest of white America that emboldens it. And so, I think part of what makes it difficult for white people to call this out is that they sort of detach themselves from it. Like, as long as I don't identify with the extreme form of white supremacy, then I'm not a part of the problem. Like, I'm not a white supremacist, so clearly I'm not racist, you know. And that's really dangerous because when we think of that notion of white solidarity that we talked about during season one, it can really indirectly empower those extremist groups.

**Miranda:** Yeah.

**Noelle:** And so that, you know, that white identity piece is important to understand for all of us and I'm not sure even white people have this reflection to the depth that they really should in terms of their whiteness.

**Miranda:** Oh, definitely, you know. And I think in, you know, in addition to the silence, you kind of touched on it but being able to recognize it, you know, becoming a critical thinker, right? So, there's a lot of messaging in the media, I was listening to the radio the other day and I heard... I just caught the tail end of it. It was an ad. It was like, Macy's was doing some type of scholarship fund or something like that and they said scholarships were going to go to deserving Black kids. And I was like...

**Noelle:** 'Deserving'?

**Miranda:** Yeah, exactly. Exactly, right? And so, what message does that send? That there are others that are not deserving simply because of where they grew up or their experience or, you know, their lack of access, things like that. So, just very interesting. And that's just one instance, you know, so...

**Noelle:** Right.

**Miranda:** So, before we get into this, we want to acknowledge that race is obviously only one piece of someone's identity. You know, things like gender, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, national origin et cetera, those are... they all intersect to create our sense of self but for the purpose of what we're speaking about today, we're going to focus on the construct of race, right? So, last season, we completed an activity together that helped us understand the tendency to surround ourselves by people who are like us, right? So, we just... as we discussed, it increases the likelihood of favoring people from our in group, so to speak. So, Noelle and I completed this quiz together. It's taken from *Courageous Conversations* about race by Glenn Singleton and it's called 'The Color Line Exercise'. So, some of you may know this activity is like 'step up step back' if you've ever done it in person. You're asked a series of questions, you stand on a line altogether. You ask a series of questions, if it applies to you, you step forward. If it doesn't apply to you, you step back. So, we'll do this obviously verbally. And it's used as an activity to call out the existence of privilege and in this case, specifically, race.

**Noelle:** Yeah. So, I'm going to read the questions from *Courageous Conversations* and we're not going to do step forward, step back because we're not all together and so, the way that it is in the book is kind of using points, right? So, if you're participating with us, get a piece of paper, so you can write your scores down.

[15:04 – 20:01]

**Noelle:** Like Miranda said, we already did this, so we have our scores. Basically, you respond to each question using one of the following scores, 5 if the statement is mostly true for you, 3 if the statement is sometimes true for you and 0 if the statement is seldom true for you.

**Miranda:** And there's a total of 25 questions.

**Noelle:** Yep about 25 questions. So, I will read through these. Get your paper and pencil ready or if you're just kind of processing it. Here we go. Okay.

Because of my race or color, if I wish, I can arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

Because of my race or color, if I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.

Because of my race or color, I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

Because of my race or color, I can go shopping alone most of the time pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

Because of my race or color, I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the newspaper and see people of my race widely represented.

Because of my race or color, when I am told about our national heritage or civilization, I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

Because of my race or color, I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

Because of my race or color, I can go into supermarkets and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, I can go into any hairdresser shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

Because of my race or color, whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color to not work against the appearance of financial reliability.

Because of my race or color, I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

Because of my race or color, I can swear or dress in secondhand clothes or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.

Because of my race or color, I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

Because of my race or color, I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

Because of my race or color, I am never asked to speak for all people of my racial group.

Because of my race or color, I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

Because of my race or color, I can criticize our government and talk about how much fear its policies and behaviors cause being seen as a cultural outsider.

Because of my race or color, I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the person in charge, I will be facing a person of my race.

Because of my race or color, if a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards and children's magazines featuring the people of my race.

Because of my race or color, I can go home from most meetings of the organizations I belong to, feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, feared or hated.

Because of my race or color, I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

Because of my race or color, I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

Because of my race or color, I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

Because of my race or color, if my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

Because of my race or color, I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color and have them more or less match my skin.

Okay. So, let's talk about our scores. Miranda and I did this. I had a 117. I mean most of my answers were fives. If I didn't answer five, it was because of like, I was a woman or sometimes I feel like an outsider in my own race, speaking out about racism and white privilege. But for the most part, all of my answers were fives. So, what was yours?

**[20:02 – 25:04]**

**Noelle:** So, I had 117.



**Miranda:** I had a whopping 58. So, literally, basically, half of your score actually.

**Noelle:** Right. Right.

**Miranda:** Most of my scores were threes and, you know, as I was going through, I was like, torn for some of them. Most of the questions, I could have answered zero, right? Just knowing historically like, that those are just true, you know. But the fact of the matter is that some of those experiences just didn't apply to me personally and now whether that's because I grew up in a progressive liberal place, with a diverse group of friends or had... really had access to resources and money, right? Which is yet another form of privilege that should be remembered as well. But yeah, 58.

**Noelle:** I mean, when we think of the context of this, you know, it's important to really also think about the presence of whiteness and people's personal sense of whiteness. I think probably a lot of those questions as I was reading through, many white people probably haven't even considered. Like, having ever reflected on that, you have that experience and that you're privileged to not have to worry about it or not have to think about it. And so, having, you know, spoken about white privilege and systemic racism when we were in season one, you know, we wanted to dig a little bit deeper today because whether we want to acknowledge it or not, folks reap the benefits of just being white and existing within the system of white supremacy. So, if we're all actively participating in it and not challenging our place in it, then it can be dangerous. You know, it isn't always overt racism that we're fighting, it's the response of silence that gives it more power.

**Miranda:** Yeah, well, and even more so, you know, overt racism, you can call out, you can see it, you might name it. It's the micro-aggressions, it's the silence, it's... those are the things that so many people just deny, you know, because they can't see them. So, obviously, white being an identity, not all white identity is created equal just like anything else, so again, Dr. Barner Hess also has this theory of the eight white identities, which range anywhere from white supremacists at one extreme to white abolitionists at the other. So, they're as follows. I'm gonna read from my phone, okay? So, white supremacist; clearly marked white society that preserves names and values white superiority. (2) White voyeurism; desires non-whiteness because it's interesting, pleasurable, seeks to control the consumption and appropriation of non-whiteness. There's this fascination with culture and this person wouldn't challenge a white supremacist. There's also white privilege, right? Something, you know, kind of a hot button, a hot word right now. Many may critique supremacy but a deep investment in questions of fairness, equality under the normalization of whiteness and the white rule, sworn goal of diversity. There's white benefit; sympathetic to a set of issues but only

privately. They wouldn't speak or act in solidarity publicly because of benefiting through whiteness in public. (5) would be the white confessional; some exposure of whiteness takes place but as a way of being accountable to POC after seeking validation from POC. And there's a white critical, which is number six. They take on board critiques of whiteness and invest in exposing, marking the white regimen. They refuse to be complicit with the regimen and whiteness speaking back to whiteness. (7) would be a white traitor, which I was like, oh, this is kind of intense. So, white traitor actively refuses complicity, they name what's going on. Their intention is to subvert white authority and to tell the truth at whatever cost. We need them to dismantle institutions. And then the white abolitionists on the furthest end of the spectrum. They're changing institutions, dismantling whiteness and not allowing whiteness to reassert itself. So, that is kind of a spectrum, right? From right to left, if you will.

**Noelle:** Yeah, and sort of just, you know, trying to reflect on where you feel like you fall there, you know, and then that leading to where the work really needs to be done, you know. Research shows there's not a direct correlation between white identity and racist attitudes. But I think exploring how we feel, that, you know, advances for marginalized people are a threat to white culture or how status is somehow being lost as others gain more power is really where a lot of the work needs to be done. And also, you know, some of those identities of not speaking out or benefiting from living within this white supremacist culture, right? There's a lot in the middle, a lot of nuances in the middle and I would imagine in some environments, people's white identity comes out in some ways and in some other environments, it might come out in other ways. You know, identity for anyone impacts how we interpret the world around us.

[25:05 – 28:45]

**Noelle:** So, when we think about our white identity, you know, thinking about how do I view certain political decisions, who am I comfortable sharing resources and power with or, you know, what biases do I have that impact my judgments of people of color.

**Miranda:** Yeah. Yeah, definitely. And, you know, this isn't just about white supremacy or extremist violence. In reality, the presence of both of those things are actually low when we think of statistics, but the impact of them is drastic and devastating and within our history of how white supremacy has shaped the culture of our country, the realization is quickly coming to life that it's reactivated with someone in the White House, right? Who value those beliefs. So, it's clear that we need to be willing to interrogate this or, you know, interrogate it in society and within ourselves as well.

**Noelle:** Yeah. You know, and it could be uncomfortable and scary and I think there's a tendency to want to either ignore certain parts of history or kind of say, like, 'well, that happened, why do we have to keep bringing it up' kind of a thing but it's impossible to like, understand where we are currently in society if we're not viewing it in context of what our history is.

**Miranda:** Yep.

**Noelle:** So, it's nearly impossible. You know, we can't talk about these issues without recognizing how we got here.

**Miranda:** Yeah.

**Noelle:** You know, and so, I think when we think about our willingness to learn and grow, it kind of brings me back to the reflection of what zone are we in. We've talked about the kind of comfort zone. If we stay in that comfort zone where we feel safe, we're just not willing to be able to do this work because it's safe and comfortable to just kind of stay in this place of either silence or ignorance or benefiting from it or whatever that comfort zone is for you. You know, or the fear zone, where we make excuses and then never make any progress because we're just too afraid to confront and acknowledge some of these things. So, we're hoping, you know, that we're pushing you all into the learning zone, where we're acknowledging these challenges, you know, and extending into... extending our comfort zone a little bit.

**Miranda:** Yeah.

**Noelle:** So, that eventually... Yeah, so that we reach this growth zone, right? Where we're like finding purpose by using what we've learned so that we can face and deal with these problems, like do something about it.

**Miranda:** Yeah, and I think it's really important to remember, you know, we recently changed our bio to 'we're here to call people in, not call people out' and so many people doing this work aren't judging you. You know what I mean? Like, we, regardless of your race and your experiences, we're all in this together learning, you know, a person of Color, myself included, you know. So, I think it's important to remember that it's also just not about you, you know, at the end of the day. So, you know, ask questions, you know, check us out on social media, you know, we're here to educate, we're here to learn ourselves and we just really want to thank you all for joining us today as we kick off season two. Make sure you tune in next week as we explore Black fatigue, stereotype threat and how this plays out in a white world. Bye everyone.

**Noelle:** Byeeee.

**[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 at the\_unpackedproject.

**Miranda:** And if you enjoyed today's episode, visit our website at [theunpackedproject.com](http://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:** We'll see you next week.

**Noelle:** Peace!