

5.4 Veronica Chambers BLM: How Will You Respond?

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Veronica Chambers

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00
You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Five, Episode Four: "Black Lives Matter: How Will You Respond?"

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:14
Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

V Veronica Chambers 00:47
Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. Oh my goodness, do I have an amazing episode for you today! This episode was kind of like a "pinch me" moment, because I had the opportunity to talk to a New York Times journalist named Veronica Chambers. She is, um...she's so amazing. She's so impressive. She has done so many cool things in her career and in her life, and I can't believe I got to talk to her. I was like, "Is this...is this really my life?"

J Jasmine Bradshaw 01:23
Let me tell you a little bit about Veronica Chambers. She is the editor of Narrative Projects, a team dedicated to starting multi-layered series and packages at The Times. The Times! The New York Times! When she first started out the New York Times, she was the editor of Past Tense. This was a story team that published articles inspired by photography that The New York

Times discovered as they digitized their photo archives. So for her work at The Times she has won awards from the News Women's Club of New York and the Jane Addams Peace Association. Can you even? She's so cool. Before she started at the time, she actually wrote and edited several books and anthologies, which she still does. She's still a writer, and that's what we're going to talk about today.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:09

So a few of her books that you might have heard of are "Mama's Girl," which is a critically acclaimed memoir that she wrote, but she's also written children's books. She wrote a book called "Shirley Chisholm is a Verb." And--I couldn't believe when I read this part, because I've actually read this book--she co-wrote, "Yes, Chef" with Marcus Samuelsson. Have you seen "Chopped?" Do you remember on "Chopped," he is one of the celebrity chef judges, and he has a restaurant in New York. e is like, so cool. I cannot believe how amazing Veronica is.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:43

So in this conversation today, we're going to be talking about her most recent book, and it is called "Call and Response: The Story of Black Lives Matter." Now the hardest thing about a podcast is that I can't show you, because this book is one of the most beautiful books. It is a coffee table book, you know what I mean? Like it has amazing photos in it, and an amazing story to go along with it. And it's really written for, like, middle schoolers and high schoolers who are learning about Black Lives Matter and the activism that went into creating the movement and how they've sustained the movement all the way until today. So I say it's a coffee table book so that you can get a vision in your head of how gorgeous this book is. But it's really a guidebook. When I was reading it, I felt just like she was giving me a step-by-step instruction of how I can be a better activist in my life. And I thought, "I know this is geared towards high schoolers, young adults, middle schoolers," but really, it was informative and refreshing for me. I took copious notes; you should see the document that I have just all of the things that I was able to learn from the story of Black Lives Matter. So I cannot wait to share this episode with you. I think you're going to learn so much from Veronica. And what I really took from our conversation, is that our response to this movement--that the call is already out there: Black Lives Matter, right? And what are we going to do in order to respond to that call? What does that look like in our own lives? Whether we are a person who is trying to be more anti-racist, or just a parent who has kids at home, and you're trying to lead them and help them figure out what it looks like to be an activist in their own life. One of the things that you'll hear Veronica say is that she felt a little bit embarrassed, because when Black Lives Matter was happening, her daughter was already a teenager, and she realized that she hadn't really had a lot of conversations with her daughter about the hard parts of racism. She says that she embraced the "Black girl magic" of it all. But she didn't really talk as much about the tough stuff. And I was just thinking, "Oh my gosh, Veronica, you're embarrassed? Look at what you've done!" She realized that there was a part of her life, that she wasn't fully living out her activism in the way that she wanted to. And so she went off and wrote a book about it, to share with all of us. So I really feel like this book is such a gift to us as parents on how we can help our kiddos really figure out what activism looks like for them. But it really is a gift to ourselves: what is activism in our lives? How will we respond to the call of Black Lives Matter?



J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:24

Before I let Veronica take it away, I do want to tell you that there's a lot of stuff that she mentions in the episode, and everything will be linked in the show notes. So we were able to link to all of her books in the show notes and every resource that she talked about. So don't worry. Don't feel like you have to grab a pen and scribble everything down. I have it all in the show notes. If you just click where you're listening, or go to firstnamebasis.org, you can see all of the links there.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:50

Speaking of the show notes, one of my most exciting links in the show notes is the link to sign up for the Bite-Sized Black History waitlist. Now, if you're not sure, Bite-Sized Black History is the program that I created for you so that you can have a meaningful Black History Month celebration in your home or in your classroom. And we are actually jumping into Season Two of Bite-Sized Black History! Last year, we had over 600 families and teachers invest in Bite-Sized Black History for themselves and for their kiddos, and it is an amazing podcast just for kiddos. So what I've done, is I take twelve Black Americans from American history, and I really tried to find people that either you've never heard of, or you've heard of them, but you're not quite sure who they are. And I do a ton of research to figure out what they were like and what their life was like. And then I take all of that information and put it into a podcast episode just for kiddos. So the great thing about Bite-Sized Black History is that you press play on the podcast episode and then you can get out your booklet that goes along with it. The booklet has an illustration of the person that you're learning about and reflection questions. So while they're listening, they can be coloring the illustration. And then after you finish, it's really meant for you to connect, and to have really deep meaningful conversations about what you've just heard. So you can talk about the reflection questions together. And you can really dig into the people that you're learning about. It is so fun. It's so exciting. And I just can't wait to share all these people with you. We are learning about pilots and figure skaters, journalists and inventors, zoologists... Like, it's gonna be so cool. So if you are excited about Black History Month, and you want to get your hands on Bite-Sized Black History, just go to firstnamebasis.org/bsbh, that just stands for Bite-Sized Black History. [Firstname basis.org/bsbh](http://firstnamebasis.org/bsbh). And you can sign up to get on the list, and we will send you sneak peeks of what we're working on. And as soon as it's available, we will send you a coupon code to use in your investment. So Bite-Sized Black History will be available on February 1, and that link again is firstnamebasis.org/bsbh. You can find the link in the show notes or on firstnamebasis.org.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:12

All right, my friends here is New York Times journalist, editor, and author Veronica Chambers.

V Veronica Chambers 08:19

My name's Veronica. I guess we'll be just on first name basis, my last name's Chambers. And I grew up in New York. I grew up in Brooklyn. My family's Afro-Latina. And, um, and you know, I think partly because my parents, because my parents were, you know, new to the United States, I thought a lot about like, race and what does it mean to be American? And what are we figuring out here? And I think, you know, I was just like a complete, like, library nerd and I love

books and and I and I really dreamed of being a writer. And you know, it's funny cuz I, this past weekend, I was going back and rereading "Little Women," and I was like, "Oh my god, I'm still so Joe." Like, I'm like, "If I can publish a book, that would be a thing!" And it's still kind of a dream that I get to, and I do a lot of different kinds of books, like, I've done books with chefs, have been kind of part of my career. I wrote, "Yes, Chef" with Marcus Samuelsson, who's an amazing chef. "32 Yolks" with Eric Ripert, who is an amazing chef. And then I wrote a book called "Between Harlem and Heaven" with a chef named JJ Johnson.

V

Veronica Chambers 09:32

So I've just had a really lucky time writing about food, and, but I also write books for kids. And you know, this book that we're going to talk about, "Call and Response: The Story of Black Lives Matter" really grew out of the summer of 2020. My daughter was twelve. She turned thirteen that year, and I had a big "aha" moment, because I realized that I had leaned in so much to the "Black girl magic" with my daughter that we have not had a lot of hard conversations about the stuff of race that other parents might have had. And sometimes I feel embarrassed to admit that because people are like, "Wait, she was 13, and you hadn't been talking a lot about police brutality, and Black codes and systemic racism and all of these things?" But you know, honestly, I just, you know, it's a conversation that I have with a lot of my friends of color, of all different kinds of color. It's like, you have to make the decision. You have to make it for where you live, and the kid that you have, and that's a very individual decision. But I was living in the New York area. I had a kid who was in a bilingual school. We were really lucky that a lot of her teachers were Latinx, teachers of different backgrounds. We just leaned in on the joy and culture, you know? And it was just a personal decision. But by summer 2020, we couldn't rely on that. We needed to have some deeper conversations, and so we did. And I really use those conversations as a basis for the book.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 11:18

Thank you for sharing the personal story behind the book, because it's...after reading it, it's so clear how that comes through. Because like I was telling you right before we hit "record," I feel like it's really a guidebook for activism, for you, know, I mean, you said you kind of are gearing it towards the, like, middle-school-high-school age, but I as an adult was like taking copious notes, because it's so, so powerful. I think one of the biggest things I want your advice on is, there really is a mixed message that our children are getting about police. My daughter is in preschool, and she just came home last week with a paper about how police are community helpers. And I remember feeling a twinge of confusion within myself, because I do want her to understand that that can be true sometimes. But sometimes it's really not true. So I'm wondering, as you are navigating those conversations with your daughter during last summer and writing the book, do you have any advice, especially for parents of color, about how to talk to their kids when it comes to the police?

V

Veronica Chambers 12:25

Yeah, I mean, I one thing I would say, Jasmine, is that, and this is something I've been trying to stress in my conversations with the book, that I'm, I really think this is a conversation that all parents should be having with their kids. I don't think Black people started racism in this

country, and I don't think we can end it alone. And so I think that's really important. I think one of the things that I told my daughter is that I think policing is one of the hardest jobs in America. And the reason is it become, it's come to mean so many things. And it's more than one department or group of people could literally ever do. And so I'm not going to be able to find the page, because I didn't bookmark it beforehand, but you know, like, in one section of the book, we talk about how police departments are, the basic thing that they were set up to do, well, first of all, you know, American policing does have its roots in slave capture. And so that's something that I think my daughter was shocked to learn. After Reconstruction, when you no longer had, you know, free labor, one of the ways that you could get someone to work for you for no money was for them to be accused and convicted of a crime. And so, you know, when we talk about the prison industrial system, and I think, you know, a documentary like Ava DuVernay's "The 13th" is a great learning place for parents to dive into that. It's it's not anti-police. It's saying systemically that this is problematic, because it was built on a problematic system. And you know, one of the things that I really asked my white family friends, parental friends, last year was, people call me, you know, like, in the midst of all the stuff, "What can I do? I'm really heartbroken." And I would say read Isabel Wilkerson's "Caste." Listen to it on audio. I just, I asked my friends and my community to do some of the work, to meet me, so that it's not me convincing you as an individual, we're having a conversation based on a great deal of research.

V

Veronica Chambers 14:58

So one of the things that I said to my daughter last year, and you know, that everyone was saying, and one of the reasons why one of the chapters in the book is called "What is Systemic Racism," is I grew up at a time when people were saying a racist was a bad apple. And we see that a lot with police, you know? When there's a situation, when there's a killing, when someone has crossed the line, it's a bad apple. And I think one of the things that the Black Lives Matter movement did over the course of the last eight to ten years, is that they really said, "Let's not make this about individuals." It is about a system that is based on something that is deeply flawed and that supports problematic, and, you know, willfully harmful behavior. And that's, that's a more difficult and complicated conversation to have. So I said to my daughter, "Let's not talk about calling an individual a racist, or a particular state a racist state, or a particular community a racist community. That's not actually a useful conversation. The conversation that I think we started to have in 2020 was really saying if we understand that America is deeply built, embedded within so many of our systems, our laws, our institutions, you know, voting rights, all of these things, are these deep systemic differences, then, that's a different conversation. It's not about a blame game. It's about you know, what Lin-Manuel Miranda called the "American Experiment," and how we evolved that, and that we can experiment to a more perfect union. And I think that my daughter understood it, because what I was telling her is that it's complicated. And blaming one person, or one, you know, case, or one thing, doesn't actually solve it. We actually have a monumental task ahead of us.

V

Veronica Chambers 17:10

But I think one of the things that was inspiring about 2020 is that experts believe that as many as 26 million people in America participated in some sort of Black Lives Matter event last year, which would make it the largest protest movement in our nation's history. And if you think we are a country that spent 100 years getting women the vote, suffrage was 100 years,

reconstruction to the modern Civil Rights Movement was another 100 years... Like, this conversation about systemic racism, I mean, I hope that we, like, amazing things happen. And we take great leaps. But we also have to say, you know, as a country, things move forward, they move backwards. And what, what I tried to get my daughter to think about is, what kind of citizen do you want to be? And how much responsibility are you willing to take on to say, "I am invested in making things better and different."

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 18:16

I love that last piece about what kind of citizen you want to be. And I when you were talking, there were two things that stuck out to me. The first being how complicated this conversation is. And the second being the huge responsibility of the police force and the different departments. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was pulled over because my registration was out of date. I had no idea. It was one of those things I just didn't know. But as the police officer was walking up to the car, I turned to my daughter, and I said, "You have to be really quiet. You have to be still." I was very stern about what we had to do, right? And afterwards, she had a lot of questions, because she could sense my anxiety in it. And so we're talking about it. And I didn't realize she was watching a movie, and I was talking to my husband about it, and one of the things I said was, "I'm just so frustrated that the person who helps you understand that there's some money that you owe to the state that you haven't paid yet also carries a gun. Like, why is that the case?" You know, and we were talking about that. And then later on in that evening, I was putting her to bed and she said, "Mom, why does he have a gun? What is it for?" And so I'm trying to explain like, well, sometimes police officers hurt people. And it was just really complicated. So thinking about it in terms of our own actions, of what kind of citizens we want to be, I think is such a powerful framing. And then recognizing that especially in the Black community, we have so many different ideas about what needs to happen next. There is a lot of research about different people who want abolition, people who want reform, people who want defunding. It's just all we know is that we want police to stop killing us. But we have a lot of different avenues that we can see forward. And so I think my question is, what do you think families can do in terms of taking the next step? Because when I was reading the book, one of the biggest things that stuck out to me is the different ways that you talked about protesting. You talked about bake sales and calling officials and how protesting really looks different for everyone. And that's why you called it "Call and Response," like, what is your call? And what's your response going to be? What advice you have for families about how they can figure out what that is for them? And what protesting looks like in their lives?

V

Veronica Chambers 20:35

Yeah, absolutely. So one thing I want to mention, I did find the section about police, and there's a great book by a Brooklyn College professor named Alex Vitale called "The End of Policing," and I think one of the things that I think is helpful for people to think about is that police today are expected to do much more than solving and prevent crimes. They're asked to manage car accidents, and domestic disputes, truancy, to address calls that relate to people who are dealing with mental illness and addiction. When someone's dog is missing, the first call is often to the police. And you know, in 2016, David Brown, who was then the chief of police in Dallas, was like, "We're asking cops to do too much." Every societal failure is put off on cops to solve. And, schools fail, give it to the cops. A dog is missing, chase, give it to the cops. Policing was never meant to do all of those things. So I think the interesting thing about "The End of

Policing" is it's not saying we will not be protected, we will not be taken care of as a community. It's saying, where do we divert funds, because we spend more on policing than almost any other western nation? Where do we divert funds so that people can get the help that they need for domestic disputes, for mental health issues, for addiction issues? We all know those acute issues in our community. And they're actually not safe issues for cops who are not trained to deal with them, to deal with that, a peril to them. And so I just want to say that with all sensitivity and respect to every cop who has ever had to, like, show up for something that is way out of her or his purview. And that's on the institution. And it's on the failings of our legislature, legislators, to evolve and spend on visionary thinking around that particular institution.

V

Veronica Chambers 22:35

So back to different kinds of protests. One of the things that I really struggled with, because you know, even hearing you talk about being pulled over, there's so much painful history around all of this. But I think, I think about "Call and Response" in a lot of different ways. And so the first half of the book is really, how did we get here? You know, there's a, there's a timeline of the modern civil rights movement, but there's also a timeline of the modern Black Power movement. And, you know, like, I think that's something that we've been hearing from parents and teachers that, you know, we're getting close to Black history month again. We often hear about Martin Luther King, but do we hear about Angela Davis and Malcolm X? And what the Black Panthers did when they were questioning policing in 19? You know, that is a conversation that's very old. And so we really tried to give a grounding and how we got here and the complexity of it.

V

Veronica Chambers 23:37

The second half of the book is really about what do people do in response to it? And I think that is where the hope comes in. And that's where the joy comes in. Because really, you know, the fact is, every moment, every decade of our American existence, has had tremendous, like struggle and strife for Black people and other groups of people. Like that is just a fact. Right? And, but we also know that our response to that, as Black people has always been hope and digging in and creativity. You know, like, when you think about the blues and jazz and modern gospel, it comes out of not having, like, economic equality and racial equality and desegregation and all of these things. It comes out of, like, putting creativity to our experience. So for example, in the music chapter, something that I didn't realize is that "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday was the first protest song to be considered a real American iconic piece of music. So before that, protest songs were kind of like chants that you heard, but "Strange Fruit" elevated it so you could listen to "Strange Fruit" and really not know what it's about, but you could, I mean, you could, you could just be like, "Wow, that's just like a song getting it out." And, and it's gonna move you. But it, it is like the first modern, like amazing protest song. And so in the music section, we actually put together playlists. And we talked about the modern civil, modern protest movement playlist, modern Civil Rights playlist, and the Black Lives Matter protests playlists. And, you know, we talk about how songs like Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" became an anthem to the Black Lives Matter movement. And one of the things that, you know, like when I Zoom with classrooms, or talk to teachers, or talk to parents, or talk to my own daughter, is, I'm like, because I think it's true, anyone who takes on the work of anti-racism, you're going to be exhausted. You're going to feel like, "How much can one person do?"

But I think that's where the music and the art and the literature, that's the way that we've always filled ourselves back up, so that we can get more. And so I guess that's something I would say to anyone who's listening. And I've talked about this now with a number of, like, really full-time activists. And I think one of the great things about this generation of activists is they talk about burnout. They talk about self care. And the fact is, is that, you know, it's a marathon. It's not a race. Racial justice, racial equality, is not a sprint of any kind. 2020-2021 has taken so much from so many of us. If you need to step away, if you need to not be writing letters to your congressperson or volunteering somewhere or at your kids school, and, you know, like planning, you know, a Black history play, you know, the way that so many of us have done, it's okay. It's okay to take a step back and fill yourself up and use some of the many, many, many pieces of, like, creativity and art that people have made for this purpose, to, like, refill you, to re-inspire you, to help you recommit and then decide what the next step is. Like, we don't have to figure it all out, and we can't figure it all out by ourselves. We have to take it in pieces.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 27:41

Well, thank you for that, because I needed to hear that. Oh, my gosh, especially the piece about the music. And when you were talking, I was thinking about a part in the book that I think connects really well. When you were talking about how we talk a lot about Martin Luther King, but not very much about Malcolm X or Angela Davis, there was a part that really stuck out to me, because when I'm thinking about this work, I'm like, okay, a lot of the people that I'm talking to are just starting out on their journey, or they benefit from white privilege, and they're trying to figure out what to do next. And then you see a lot of really amazing, intense activists, like in the streets doing things and you're feeling like, "Oh, man, I'm not doing enough." But when I was reading, you were talking specifically about how we need both. We need the people who are on the inside talking to policymakers and power holders. And we need the people who are on the outside, like, completely dedicated to the needs of the community. And that in working together, that's where the magic happens. And so I think I just wanted to pull those two pieces together, just because I felt so much validation. And when we're moving forward, we are doing good work. And it's okay if it looks different from someone else's.

V

Veronica Chambers 28:53

Absolutely. I mean, I think that last year was my daughter's first time attending a protest. And one of my favorite sections of the book was the "Who's Who at the Protests" And I think that, like so many people, I thought, and she thought, that a protest was just, you know, a mass of people. And when you look at the photos in our book, you see thousands of people in the street, but to realize that, you know, there are legal observers, there are people who are there to help the protesters if they get into legal trouble. Some of them are trained lawyers, some of them are, you know, paralegals, you know, all kinds of experiences. There are medics there to make sure that people stay safe. There's a statistic that we have in the book that between 1910 and 2010, I believe that 60% of peaceful protests have had some positive win. And the reason that, you know, the reason that we don't live in an age of like, "burn down the castle," Marie Antoinette, "off with her head," is because that actually doesn't work over the long term. And peaceful protests around the world, is the most powerful way to enact change. So if you look at the "Who's Who at the Protests," you think, "Oh my gosh, someone might be a nurse. They might be an EMT. They might be a doctor," and they go to the protest just to take care of

people. You know, the bike, the people on bikes, help to, like, scout out the route, but they also manage tensions between the protesters who are on foot and people who are driving, you know? I just think that that idea that everybody has a role to play is very powerful, especially cuz I was, my daughter is much more outward-looking than me. I was a total shy kid. And to think, you know, that my, like, listening and interviewing people, and writing a book like this, I would have never thought because I'm not the person to stand on stage, or stand in front of a thousand people in the street, that I had a role to play. But I think that, it's really great to know that if you love to do something, if you love to make art, that you know, murals. I loved, oh, my God, so there are over, I think there are 170 photos in the book. We probably went through twelve hundred photos to choose that. Because it's actually very expensive to publish photographs. So you have to, they were like, you know, you guys have to like, move on. And, and one of the things that we did when we were choosing the murals in the book is that we really looked for murals that had a story behind them. And, like, one of my favorites was done by a father and daughter. And I just, you know, the fact that in the midst of the George Floyd trials and Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, you know, that the father and daughter went out and spent days making this beautiful mural of hope, was so inspiring to me. Another one was made by a group of university classmates who weren't even artists, but they work together. And they like made a plan. And they made this mural. And I don't know if you have a lot of murals in Arizona, but in New York and Philly, where my husband is from, there's so many murals, and I just think it's so inspiring. Like, it reminds us of, of everything of, of what we've lost, it's, and murals give us an opportunity to mourn. But they also remind us of hope, and what we dream of, you know? They put our dreams in giant, you know, giant images across the wall. And so, so the idea that anybody who loves to do anything, can make a difference. To lean into what you love, and and believe that you that what you do matters.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 33:00

Yeah, honing in on that zone of genius, and then using it as a tool. I think that's really cool. One of the things that stuck out to me too, as I was reading the book was just the sense of community, the people who came together. Like you were saying, I almost feel like a protest is like a microcosm of what is happening in our larger community. And I think one of the hardest things for families, especially families with kids, with activities and school and all that is finding the place or finding the space. Do you have any advice for how people can get out into their community and connect with what the activists are doing?

V

Veronica Chambers 33:38

Sure. You know, it's interesting, because we interviewed both Alicia Garza, who was one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, but also DeRay Mckesson who talks about this. And he talked about being student body president in junior high school and high school and college. And he was saying, you know, the reason that we go to football games, the reasons we got homecomings, the reason we, you know, joined Student Government, is even if we're a little bit of a loner, we longed to be in community. And I think both of them said, you know, start with your friends, if there's something you want to do to make a difference. And, you know, my, one of my favorite pieces that I wrote last year was about Bakers Against Racism. And, you know, you can follow them on Instagram. And Paola Velez, who you should also follow, is a young chef from Washington, DC who is one of the founders. She's amazing. But you know, Bakers Against Racism. They started last summer with the goal to convince 80 bakers to do

bake sales in their own communities to raise money for organizations doing the work of racial justice. More than 2000 bakers in 41 states and on five continents signed up and in the past last year alone, they've raised more than \$2 million from bake sales for groups such as Black Lives Matter, the United Negro College Fund, the Equal Justice Initiative, and the Innocence Project. And you know, Paola has this great line that she says, and she says that, you know, that very act of patience, I mean, baking, it's, it's something that lets you think about your ideas. And so she said, "When we speak about issues that we care about, we do it with a pie in hand." And so sometimes it's a little more graceful, and a little bit more powerful, because there's something sweet at the end of this, like, very charged, very truth forward, statement that we have to make. And she always says you can make the world a better place, because, you know, baking requires you to be still. And I think, especially for parents of very young kids, you know, it's so funny, I baked something with my daughter this weekend. And I was remembering that we used to watch a show called Backyardigans." And the first time you bake something with my daughter, it was a, there was an episode called "Samurai Pie." And she wanted to make a samurai pie and I was like, "Oh, my God, how do we do that?" And we ended up, and I was like, I don't know, she's four, I was like, I was like, "I'll just lie to her and tell her that this blueberry tart is the samurai pie." And, and so we just made like a little tart. And I still remember like, just, you know, smoothing out the dough, and then filling it with like the blueberry filling and just leaving it on top and sprinkling a little sugar on it. And I just think that that idea that you could bake something and sell it in a community and make a donation, you know, something I used to do when my daughter was younger, is I would say, "Okay, let's give \$5 on a Sunday." And I know that not everybody has that. And the pandemic has been very hard on people. But I would give her, even before she could like really read, I would say "Okay, there's a pajama fund that gives kids pajamas, because when kids go to homeless shelters, they don't often have some kind of sleeping clothes. So there's a pajama fund. Would you like to give \$5 to the pajama fund?" That would give her options. And so once a month, we would have like a give day, and I would give her options. And I think that, you know, just to go back to Black history, I really believe as someone who came to this country as first generation American, that, you know, one of the deepest ideas in Black American culture is the idea of "Each one teach one. Each one bring one." And I really, I think that the most revolutionary thing we can do is to listen more often on a daily basis, to really try to connect with people. I mean, I find it even now in the middle of this pandemic, I'm I mean, there was a point like, literally, I don't know how long it took us to confirm this podcast, but I was working like 15-16 hour days. And I would just be like, "Okay, I'm done, because I can't sit up any longer." And then I have to get my daughter ready for school and eat food and do this, and then try to get up and make it, you know, 16-hour days for weeks on end. And I would find myself when I'm so tired, and I'm so afraid of getting sick and all this other stuff going on. And I would just have to stop myself and I would say, "Okay, make an eye connection with the person at the grocery store who does not have the option to work at home, and who you know, is so at risk for everything that's been happening. Make an eye connection with a teacher who's in the classroom with half the kids with their mask off their face, and they're so exposed." You know, like, I just, I just feel like even just taking a deep breath and saying, "Who are the everyday heroes around me? And can I look them in the eye? Can I make sure to thank them? Can I ask them if they need anything? Can I bring them a cup of coffee? Can I do anything?" Like it's just I think that's activism. Like I don't know, people may say I'm wrong, but all these people who are like "It may be one thing to protest in the streets," and that's, I'm a journalist when I don't go to protest because I'm a journalist but, too, it's also not, you know, it's not my strong suit. But I do feel like the way that I try to show my activism is by being really present and really listening to people and really trying to connect with who are the heroes around me. How can I help? How can I make their lives and days a little bit better? Because you, we have a lot of people doing really, really hard work around us.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 40:04

Oh, yeah. What I hear you saying is that investment of time and the investment of recognizing people's humanity goes a lot further than we realize. Yeah. Wow. And the other thing I thought of when you were talking about the activists that you had an opportunity to interview, which is like I couldn't, when I opened it, and was reading direct quotes from these people, I was like, "We got to talk to them. That's so cool." So many of them were teachers, so many of them. I mean, Brittany Packnett Cunningham, there were so many teachers, and I just thought, "Wow, like, look at the activism that is happening every single day in the classroom, that these people have the skills to go and lead movements." Like, I think that what you were saying about recognizing that students have an opportunity to lift where they stand, and that we are taking our kids each day into a space where they're learning how to be a member of a community, and what it looks like to live your values and stand up for what you need and help advocate for the others around you. Like that is activism. So yeah, thank you.

V Veronica Chambers 41:11

Yeah, I mean, I think our teachers are doing, have always done incredible work. I mean, teachers changed my life. I mean, I, I grew up super poor. Like, I had teachers who, like, handed me books, who bought books with their own money. Who like, took me to plays, you know, like, I, I was homeless. I had a teacher who let me spend a school vacation at their house when I was in college. Like, I was just like, you know, like, teachers go above and beyond all the time. And so, you know, I just, I try to send books to teachers. And you know, The New York Times has a great, they, there's a, if there are any teachers listening, or parents who collaborate with teachers, The New York Times has something called the Learning Network, and they actually make lesson plans based upon our stories. And so one of the big stories I did last year, was on Black surfers, and it was talking about and, you know, speaking of any kind of activists. You know, in 2020, Black surfers had paddle outs for George Floyd, which is a traditional like surfing right of, of mourning someone. And, and, you know, there's just been tremendous activism in the Black surfing community. The Learning Network did a beautiful learning, teaching plan for teachers around our Black surfer story. And we have film and video and, and, and the essays that the kids write about how they learned how to dream and how they imagine themselves on the water, and what does it mean to be a writing giant? I mean, it just, it blows my mind. So I just, I'm always trying to share as many tools as I can with teachers and, and help them know that they're supported. So.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 43:05

I love that! The Learning Network. Okay, I will be sure to link that in the show notes. For anyone who's listening, just go to the website, and you can click right on it. And when you're talking, it reminded me, so I used to be a teacher, and I would always tell my husband, it is the closest you can get to being a celebrity. Because you go to the store and oh my gosh, "Miss Bradshaw! Miss Bradshaw." I'm like, "y'all I am famous." I don't know about you, but like, it is the real deal. Those kids see you and they think that you are the world, and it is, like, it's so rewarding. And you know, when you were talking actually about police officers and all the things they have to carry, it was reminding me of teaching, because you're a counselor, you're a nurse, you're just so many things, especially in, you know, overexploited, under-resourced schools. It's like you

are it. So yes, teachers, we love you. The last thing I wanted to ask you was about just the book. Like I'm imagining some kid walking through the library and picking up the book and opening it up. What would you want them to know about "Call and Response: The Story of Black Lives Matter?"

V

Veronica Chambers 44:12

I would want any kid to know that we are listening and we are supporting you. And that any call you make, be it raising your hand to be a leader, be it tagging us on the sleeve to say you need help, it you know, be it a kind of sideways job of "I'm confused. I don't understand." Like, we hear you. We're listening. We'll make time and that it's a conversation. You know, I think I think one of the things that the pandemic has shown all of our kids is that we're not perfect and we don't have all the answers. I remember at the end of last year, I sat down and had a conversation with my daughter. "I'm like so the wheels fell off the parenting bus." Yeah. And, you know, "We're not perfect, and we've done our best." And she's like, "I know you guys aren't perfect!" But you know, like, I think a lot of us, like, there was no work to escape to, like I have this big important job. And, you know, like, there was no like hiding behind our grown up-ness. And so I think that in that same way, I think that we, I just would want kids to know that we're really invested. And we're invested in, in not just how you show up in all the "A" ways, you know, the great athlete and the great student, and all that. We're really invested in the journey. And if anything, I think the vulnerability of this moment has reminded a lot of us that, you know, we're all on a process. And we're really invested in helping you be part of that process, and in helping you in that process as well.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 45:58

Yes, Amen. Amen. Thank you so much, Veronica. It has been such a joy to talk to you. Before we go, I have to ask you, how can people find your work? How can they find you and connect with you?

V

Veronica Chambers 46:11

Sure. So yeah, so I am, I'm on Twitter, but I mostly just retweet and like things, so I'm not on Twitter very much. I'm on Instagram @vivichambers. And our book is published by Versify. And if you just go to the Versify website, you can always email through them, and they schedule school visits. And, you know, we do virtual school visits whenever we can. And I'll also share the link for the Learning Network. And I really, you know, I just encourage everyone, I, I want us to win. I want us to like get there together. And I want us to be more whole than we have been. So that's my intention and my investment in our community.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 46:58

Do you feel a little more hopeful? Do you feel like okay, I can do this, I have some real ideas about how to move forward? I hope that's what you got from this interview, because that's what I took away from it. I was telling Veronica after we stopped recording that I just felt a sense of healing from talking to her that I really, really needed. So I really hope you enjoyed

this episode. I hope you'll check out Veronica's books, but especially "Call and Response: The Story of Black Lives Matter." It is really a life-changing experience to read how these activists have truly taken their passion and channeled it into changing the world. All of Veronica's books and how you can reach out to her if you want to schedule a classroom visit are linked in the show notes. And don't forget in the show notes, you will also find the link to sign up for the Bite-Sized Black History waitlist. It's firstnamebasis.org/bsbh, and we will send you sneak peeks and a coupon code on February 1 as soon as bite sized black history is available for purchase.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 48:07

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site, I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there. So you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.