

4.2 Part 1: Black Lives Matter and The Family--Enslavement

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SPEAKERS

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You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Four, Episode Two: Black Lives Matter and the Family, Part One: Enslavement.

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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.

00:52

Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. I cannot believe that it is Episode Two of Season Four. I'm just so grateful. I'm so grateful for this community, for this First Name Basis family. When I started the First Name Basis podcast, I had no idea we would make it four seasons. And it just feels like such a celebration moment. And this episode, Black Lives Matter and the

Family, has been in the works for, whoo, a long time. Last summer when the Black Lives Matter movement was making so much incredible progress, I heard from a lot of you that you needed help understanding the connection between Black Lives Matter and the family. Now before I get into the episode, I do need to give you a trigger warning for all of my Black, Indigenous and people of color out there: please know that I love you and I support you. In this episode, you're going to hear things that are going to be heavy and difficult. And I absolutely understand if you need to take a step away or take a step back. Just do what is right for you. We are going to be talking about enslavement, and I absolutely understand if this is not something that you can hold right now. So just know that that is what's coming.

02:20

Black Lives Matter and the Family. So one of the things I really want you to understand on this anti-racist journey is that as parents and caregivers, we have a couple of different paths that we have to walk. The first is our own understanding of racism and anti-racism. And the second is that layer of responsibility that we have to teach the children that we love. So we can teach our kids something that we don't understand ourselves. So here at First Name Basis, I like to spend a good deal of our time teaching you the things that you need to know so that you can build the foundation you need to teach your children. So in the episode today, I hope that you find tools and resources to continue to build your foundation so that you, you can move into that space of teaching your children.

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Now one of the hardest things for me to hear last summer was white parents who were saying that they could not support Black Lives Matter, because they believe that Black Lives Matter wanted to destroy families. Now, I know that you all have been hearing the same thing, because you have told me that in your conversations is coming up, and you've said, you're not sure how to respond. So that's what we're going to cover today. What did Black Lives Matter actually say about families? And what do we need to understand about the history of Black families in our country, so that we can respond in an anti-racist way when people are saying that Black Lives Matter wants to destroy families? So I think we should start with what Black Lives Matter actually said, what was the statement that they put out about families that made people start to perpetuate these untrue things about BLM. So I am reading a direct quote that was from their website. You need to know that this quote has actually since been taken down, and I'll talk about that later. But this is the quote that everyone was referring to when they said that Black Lives Matter wants to destroy families. It says, quote, "We make our spaces family-friendly, and enable parents to fully participate with their children. We dismantle the patriarchal practice that requires mothers to work double shifts so that they can mother in private even as they participate in public justice work." Now, this is the part that people were very up in arms about. So listen closely to the

quote. Quote, "We disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and villages that collectively care for one another, especially for our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable." End quote. I hope you heard the part where I said, "we disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement." The word requirement is so key to this quote, and it's the word that I see left out in so many spaces.

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So let's break down why Black Lives Matter would have put out this statement to begin with. Now remember, I told you they have since taken down this statement, and is not on their website anymore. But of course, I was able to find it through the articles that were written about it. And the thing is, it's already out there, right? People have already formed these misjudgments and misunderstandings about Black Lives Matter and their role in families. So we need to address it, even though they've taken it down. And my guess as to why they took it down...I don't know. I didn't have an opportunity to talk to them directly. But I don't think they took it down because they changed their stance; I think they took it down because they realized that it was just hindering their progress instead of helping their progress. People were talking more about this statement than they were about the main issues at hand when it comes to Black Lives Matter and what they're trying to achieve. So they took it down to be like, "Okay, stop talking about that and talk about the things that we are really trying to focus on."

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So let's break it down. Why did Black Lives Matter say this in the first place? I can see that Black Lives Matter would make this statement because it truly is rooted in their commitment to dismantle systemic racism.

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Now pause; deep breaths. As always, these are big topics that are really important and can be very emotional. So I need you to check in with yourself, lower your shoulders, unclench your jaw, it's going to be okay. This is an important discussion. If you need a reminder about what systemic racism is, I made an episode for that. It is called Racism 101, and I will link that in the show notes.

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So this statement is truly rooted in their commitment to dismantle systemic racism. And there are so many reasons why a lot of Black families don't fit the mold of a traditional nuclear family. And all of those have been caused by systemic racism. So when we look at a lot of Black families,

they're living within family structures that do not reflect the tradition of the nuclear family. And that is why Black Lives Matter would say, "we reject the nuclear family structure requirement," not "we reject the nuclear family on its face or as a whole." We reject the requirement for people to be living in nuclear families in order to have access to resources in the community." The systems in place in our society have targeted the Black family for centuries. The Black family has been subjected to limited access to employment, limited access to wealth building opportunities, like purchasing a house. We've talked about that before, the fact that the GI Bill after World War II was very much withheld from Black veterans. And when white veterans were able to go and use the GI Bill to purchase a house and put a down payment and have a mortgage and all of that stuff, Black veterans were denied that opportunity, which meant that they weren't able to build wealth in the traditional wealth-building way that we see here in the United States. So we've got the jobs, we've got the wealth building, we have Jim Crow segregation, and so many others. So what we are going to do this week and next week in Part One and Part Two of this series, is break down two of the systems that are negatively affecting the Black family. We're going to start today with enslavement.

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As most of you know, I believe that almost all of the racism that we are seeing today in our country can be traced back to its roots in chattel slavery. So we're going to spend some time today breaking down how has enslavement affected the Black family and how are we still seeing that play out. And then next week, in Part Two of this series, Black Lives Matter and the Family, Part Two, we'll be talking about over-policing and mass incarceration. So you're going to want to listen to both of the episodes in this series so that you can really get a better understanding of, what are the systems historically that have affected the Black family? And what are the systems that we are still seeing play out today that are affecting the Black family each and every day. So let's get started with the historical context, and talk about enslavement and how it affected Black families.

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Now, when we think about enslavement in terms of the Black family, we have to understand that first, it was illegal for enslaved people to even get married. They were not considered people, they were considered property. So property cannot enter into a contract. I mean, people would track their enslaved property in the same way that they would track their livestock, right? So we don't allow cows to be involved in contracts. And that's how the enslaved people were treated. So they weren't allowed to get married to one another. And they would often treat each other like they were married--they would get into families and make these family structures, but they didn't have any of the legal protections that married people would have. So if enslaved people lived in nuclear families, it was because their enslaver was keeping them all captive at the same time. And

I want you to know that the information that I'm sharing is from an article that I read called "How Slavery Affected African-American Families," by Heather Andrea Williams, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. So this is, of course, going to be linked in the show notes.

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So we have these families of people, enslaved people who believe that they're married to each other who act like they're married to each other and have children and all of those things. And if they live together, it's because they all were enslaved by the same person. But this wasn't always the case. Oftentimes, there was a husband of the family who was not enslaved by the same enslaver. So this husband would live on a different plantation or in a different home, and only be able to see his family a couple of times a week, when he was able to get away. And they It was so common that they had a term for this kind of marriage. They called it "abroad marriages". Now we think of like long distance relationships, right? This was a forced abroad marriage, where the husband would be able to come and see his family, usually on Wednesdays and on Saturdays, unless there was something that he had to do. So any work that had to be done at the enslaver's plantation or in the home had to be done before he had the opportunity to see his family. And oftentimes, they would be walking for miles each way to be able to just see their kiddos or see their wife and all of those types of things. So we had husbands who are traveling back and forth in the night to be able to see their loved ones.

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Another thing that was absolutely disturbing to me when I was doing this research is that women who gave birth had to return to work almost immediately after having children. So there would be one enslaved mother who would care for all of the children while the other mothers worked. So if this mother who had the baby was not the one who was the primary caregiver for the enslaved children, then she would have to go out into the field and do this back-breaking labor very soon after giving birth. Now I don't know about you, but I have given birth twice and it is not pretty. It is bloody; it's messy. There's--it's beautiful, of course--I was so happy to have my babies at the end of it, but man, I do not get out of bed for like weeks afterwards! The only thing I do is feed the babies and change the diapers, and I am back on the couch or in bed. So the idea of having to put your body through this torture after you have just done something so important and significant, and that's really tough on your body is really, really heartbreaking to me. And it's important to note as well that these enslaved children were taken care of, until about the age of seven, when they were supposed to be in like first and second grade. They were sent off to do the work. They began working when they were about seven or eight years old, and worked for the rest of their lives.

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The other thing that I wanted to point out about enslaved families, and you probably heard me mention this in the Juneteenth episode, where I talked about families who were looking for one another, is that they were always under the constant threat of being separated from each other, because the enslavers would sell them at will, whenever they wanted or needed. They would sell people off, and that would separate them from their families. And I'm talking mothers separated from their children, fathers separated from their entire families. I was recently in Washington, DC at the Black History Museum, and when I got to this part where it talked about families being separated, I sobbed. And it was really hard to recover from. I mean, I was tearful through the whole thing, watching what happened to my ancestors and the people that I love so much play out in front of my eyes, but also thinking about as a mother, being separated from my babies is unimaginable to me. So there were so many reasons why enslavers would sell off enslaved people. Some of those reasons include needing money, or even if the enslaver passed away, they would write what was going to happen to each enslaved person in their will. So if the enslaver died suddenly or just because they got older, then each enslaved person had something different that might happen to them based on the will of the enslaver. And sometimes it came down to the enslaver just not liking them. If these Black people were unliked by the people who are keeping them captive and torturing them, they would just give them to somebody else, sell them away. So it was so strategic, this practice of separating families was a very strategic thing that they did in order to break their spirits. In that article about how slavery affected African-American families, it says quote, "Historian Michael Tadman has estimated that approximately one-third of enslaved children in the upper South states of Maryland and Virginia experienced family separation in one of three possible scenarios: sale away from parents; sale with mother away from father; or sale of mother or father away from child. The fear of separation haunted adults who knew how likely it was to happen. Young children innocently unaware of the possibilities learned quickly of the pain that such separations could cost." End quote. Learning about this kind of stuff is why I get so disheartened when I hear people tried to minimize the effects of slavery.

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You can see how this torturous practice, which was the foundation of our country for so many years, has absolutely annihilated Black families. Frederick Douglass, who was an enslaved person who emancipated himself and became an abolitionist, suggested that quote, "Slave owners purposefully separated children from their parents, in order to blunt the development of affection between them." End quote. So the enslavers knew exactly what they were doing. And they were doing it on purpose so that these babies would not be able to form bonds with their parents. So gross. It's so gross, and we are still seeing the effects of those family separations today. And there are so many primary sources that quote enslaved people talking about how excruciatingly painful it was for them to be separated from their families. I want to read you a quote from John Rudd. He was an emancipated enslaved person, and he said, quote, "If'n you wants to know what

unhappiness means, jess'n you stand on the slave block and hear are the auctioneer's voice selling away from the folk you love." End quote

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One of the things that it's important to note here is that as Black people, we are strong, and we are resilient. And we consider ourselves a collective. Because of the trauma that has been forced upon so many Black families we try to look out for one another. So that's what these enslaved people did when their families were separated. They would reach out to one another and connect in a familial way. Kinship was not necessarily about who you shared genetics with, it was about who you were doing life with, and who you were surviving this life with. So the Black family is powerful and strong, even if it does not look the same way that people are perpetuating as the ideal.

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Before we go, I want to leave you with a quote by a journalist named David Brooks. And he says, quote, "We think of kin as those biologically related to us. But throughout most of human history, kinship was something you could create." End quote. I think we see that so much in the Black family. We see Black families creating kin out of one another, because we really, truly need each other. And here's the thing, the government did not create systems to help us try to put our families back together. Enslaved people, formerly enslaved people, newly emancipated enslaved people would put advertisements in the newspaper looking for one another. They'll be looking for their son, their daughter, their cousin, their aunt. So our families, yes, they're not going to look like this traditional quote unquote, "traditional nuclear family." But that does not make them better or worse. They're just different because we have had to create kin out of one another.

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So I hope that next week, you will tune in to Part Two of this series, it will be "Black Lives Matter and the Family: Over-Policing and Mass Incarceration." And I'm going to break down the system that is playing out today, a more current system that we are seeing that is negatively affecting Black families. And I'm sure had an effect on why Black Lives Matter said that they disrupt the western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement. Tune in next week so that we can finish this conversation. And let me know your thoughts on Instagram because we're going to be talking about Black Lives Matter and the family and the history of enslavement and the effect on the Black family all week over at our Instagram, @firstname.basis.

22:40

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 a real change in our communities. Any of the books or 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 @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.