

## 4.8 Can We Talk About White Privilege?

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### SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw

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Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Four, Episode, Eight: "Can we talk about white privilege?"



Jasmine Bradshaw 00:13

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.



Jasmine Bradshaw 00:49

Hello, First Name Basis Fam, I am so glad you are here. We have a really interesting conversation have today. I have heard from so many of you that now that you know what privilege is, especially white privilege, you can spot it, like, so quickly. You know what it is, you know what it looks like, but you're not quite sure how to respond. Like, you see it, and then you think "Okay, now what do I do?" So this whole episode is going to be about three instances of white privilege that I have seen in the last...two weeks? Week? Two weeks? I don't know, it's been really recent. And I'm going to tell you exactly how you should respond if you are also a person who holds white privilege. Now I have to tell you that I'm going into this conversation with the expectation that you believe that privilege is real, that we have a responsibility to examine our privilege, that we have a responsibility to redistribute our power, and to use that privilege and power to support marginalized communities. So if you feel like, "Oh, wait a minute, I'm not quite sure how I feel about privilege. I don't really know; I need a better understanding." I made an entire episode about that. It is Season Two, Episode 14. It's called "What is privilege and what do I do with it?" And in that episode, I break down the very definition of privilege and what it looks like in our lives. So if you feel like you're not quite able to spot it yet, or you're not quite sure what it is yet, go listen to that episode. I will link it in the show notes. But if you feel like, "I know what it is. I am ready to go," this is the episode for you. And definitely if you are still in that beginner stage, and you need to listen to that other episode first, come back here after that, because this will be the perfect follow up to that conversation.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 02:39

Now, I mentioned this before, and I want to be very clear that in this episode, I'm going to give three examples of white privilege that I've seen really recently and how people who hold white privilege can respond. So I'm talking specifically to people who are white or people who hold white privilege. If you are a Black or Indigenous person, I want you to know that you do not have responsibility in this. You do not have to respond to these situations. Of course you already know that, but I wanted you to hear it from me, because I think it's a good reminder. Sometimes we feel like when this stuff happens, everybody looks to us for what to do. But really, white people should be talking to other white people about their privilege. So just know that I love you, I support you, and that my whole mission is for us, for us Brown people. Because I feel like people are always looking to me for guidance as a Black biracial woman, and I mean, obviously I signed up for that as an anti-racist educator, but even before that, people were looking to me for guidance in these situations. And I wish that I had a place where I could send them to learn about this stuff. So I hope that you as a Black Indigenous person of color feel like this is that place where you can take what I'm saying and send it off to people so that you don't have to have these conversations over and over and over again and spend your emotional energy.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 03:59

Okay, one more thing before we dive in. I have to remind you about Ally Elementary. Ally Elementary is our brand new program that is just for families. It's anti-racist education for families. And it'll be a five week program where we are working together to teach your kiddos about race, racism, justice, inclusion—so many different important things in their lives. I've heard from all of you that you really want to have these conversations because you know how important it is, and you're not quite sure where to start or, if you have started, you're not quite sure what the path forward looks like. So let's do it together in Ally Elementary. I cannot wait. I'm so excited. You can sign up for the waitlist at [firstnamebasis.org/waitlist](http://firstnamebasis.org/waitlist) or just go to the link in the show notes. But I have to tell you that this episode is actually in perfect alignment with Ally Elementary because last week, as you saw on Instagram, if you follow us on Instagram, I was recording all of the videos and one of the lessons in Ally Elementary is about privilege, so we will be teaching our kiddos about the privilege that they hold. What does privilege look like? How does it show up in my life? How do I spend it? All of those different types of things, we'll be teaching that together to our kiddos in Ally Elementary. So consider this a little preview almost. This is like the adult version of the lesson that I give inside Ally Elementary. So definitely sign up for the waitlist at [firstnamebasis.org/waitlist](http://firstnamebasis.org/waitlist). Ally Elementary will officially open on Tuesday, October 26, so we are just like two weeks away. I'm so excited. If you sign up for the waitlist, you will be the first to know when registration opens, and you will have access to early bird pricing.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 05:44

Okay, so let's do a little privilege recap, just so that we are all on the same page. So you all know we all hold social identities. And these are the different groups that we belong to, or the different groups that we've been placed into. So this is like our racial group, our religious group, our age group. And some of our social identities hold power. And then some of our social identities caused us to be oppressed. And that's because of the systemic patterns that have been created in our society. So when you hear people say stuff like systemic racism, we're talking about the system of power that gives some people more than others, and is designed for some people to come out on top.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 06:28

So if you remember from when we talked about privilege before, I told you about the dominant culture. These are the people who have the most power in our society. So here in North America, the people who hold the most power are people who are white, male, cisgender, Christian, non-disabled, middle class, and citizens who speak English. So if

people who are white, male, cisgender, Christian, non-disabled, middle class, and citizens who speak English. So if you are a person who has any social identities that match with that group that we just talked about, who holds the most power, that means that you benefit from privilege. And as we talked about before, a lot of people hold different types of privileges. So we can hold social identities that give us power and social identities that are oppressed. Just like me, I am Black biRacial, which means that I am black, so I don't have white privilege. But I am biracial, which means that my skin is lighter than other Black people, so I have light skin privilege. That is a privilege that I hold, and a privilege that I have to take responsibility for, and figure out how I can redistribute my power, so that people who have darker skin than me have access to opportunities and justice. And one of the biggest ways that I do that is through this podcast. So that is one just one of the privileges that I hold.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 07:43

So privilege is when you have access to opportunities and resources because of your social identities. And the tricky thing about privilege is that you didn't do anything to earn it, you just have it because of the patterns that are in society that make the same people come out on top most of the time. So having privilege doesn't mean that you're a bad person or that you don't work hard. It just means that your social identities haven't made your life harder for you. So I hope that you can see that those who have identities that are marginalized face systems of oppression that those who are in the dominant culture don't face. I heard this talk by Dr. Bettina Love, they are a professor and activist, and they said that privilege is like a bank account that is always full, and that it's your responsibility to spend your privilege. So in this conversation, I'm going to give you those three examples that I was mentioning earlier about the ways that I've seen white privilege in the past couple of weeks, and then I'm going to tell you how you can spend your privilege if you find yourself in situations that are similar to these. And I know you will, because I have already heard from you all that you have found yourself in these situations, and you're not quite sure what spending your privilege would look like.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 09:04

Now I have to tell you that spending your privilege takes courage, because it will probably cause frustration or tension between you and the person that you're talking to. But I think one of the biggest things we need to understand about privilege is that it's our responsibility to spend it even if it causes friction when we confront those situations.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 09:26

So let's get into these examples of white privilege that all of us have been seeing a lot lately. Now this first one is when people say that they ignore the news. They don't watch the news. They're not interested in the news. And usually it's because people say that they don't trust the media, or they don't know who to listen to. They don't know who's telling the truth. And sometimes it's because people say, "Oh, it's too depressing. I don't, I don't really want to think about that, so I'm not plugged in to current events." And it's really important that we recognize that not paying attention to current events is, in and of itself, a privilege. I was on Instagram recently, and I saw someone who wrote a caption. And they were talking about making sure that we put our focus in the right place. And in this caption, they said, quote, "Every cause screaming for attention in the media in the day-to-day of our living." End quote. And I read that and I knew what they were trying to say, but I had a really yucky feeling because I was like, "Well, lucky for you, the media, and the causes that are, quote, unquote, 'screaming for attention,' are not affecting the day-to-day of your living." Like these causes that are in the media are going to directly affect me and my family as someone who is Black. So I have to keep up with current events. I don't have an option to not keep up with current events, because if I don't, then something bad can happen. I need to be prepared for what my family is going to face. So when people

say, "Oh, these causes are screaming for our attention in the media," or "I just don't know who to trust," it shows that what's happening in the news, what's happening around the world, what's happening in current events, isn't going to affect their family all that much. And that's why it's a privilege to not have to pay attention.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 11:10

Now, how do you respond to something like this? How do you spend your privilege? If you hold white privilege, how do you spend it in a situation where you see someone saying all of these things about the media? And I can tell you from firsthand experience, even though I don't hold white privilege, I have had this conversation many, many times. And this one specifically, I've had with the same person more than once. So let me tell you how it went. I'll break it down for you so that you can feel like you are confident when you're going into spend your privilege in this situation. So what would it look like to spend your privilege? You would need to respond and give them an opportunity to learn more. So like I said, I've had this conversation with someone who specifically said that they don't watch the news because they just don't know who to trust, and they don't know what's true. They're not sure how to find sources that are credible. And the first thing that I did was I pointed out their privilege. And I said, "Well, you don't have to watch the news, because it doesn't affect your family in the same way that it affects mine." And she said, "Well, yes, it does affect my family." And so I asked her, "Well, then why aren't you watching?" Like if it affects your family so much, why aren't you paying attention? So that's when she went into "Well, I just don't know who to trust. I don't know how to find credible sources..." And that gave me the opportunity to invite her to learn more.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 12:34

So I started by citing an expert. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while you definitely heard this episode. It was such a fantastic episode. I was able to interview an Emmy Award winning journalist named Tori Nelson. She had been a journalist for over 20 years, and she talked to us about how to teach media literacy to our children. I will link that episode in the show notes. It's Season Three, Episode 21. So what I did was I told her, "Hey, I had an opportunity to interview this journalist, and she gave me an idea for what to do if you feel like you don't know who to trust, you don't know where to turn when it comes to getting credible news sources." So the tip that I shared with her was actually something that I had read before but I was grateful that I confirmed it with Tori because I felt like giving her this tip with the background of Tori's expertise really gave me a strong argument in the situation. So this is what Tori Nelson, Emmy Award winning journalist of over 20 years, said to do when you're not sure who to turn to for your news coverage. She said you should start by choosing three different news outlets—choose one on the left, one in the middle, and one on the right. And if you are looking for a resource that can help you choose those outlets, my favorite one is called Ad Fontes Media. They have a media bias chart, and they update it all the time. Like they just released Version Eight in September. And basically what they do is they go through different news outlets, and they chart them based on whether they're left leaning, right leaning, or if they're in the middle. So you would go on Ad Fontes and you would choose three different news outlets. Choose one from the left, one from the middle, and one from the right. And then Tori said that what you do is you look for an article that's covering the same topic in each of those outlets. So you would go to the left one and find an article about immigration, on the right immigration, in the middle immigration. Then you would read each article and see what lines up from the articles. If you have information from each article that's overlapping, that shows that you're probably reading something that's a fact rather than just the opinion or the bias of that certain news outlet. Now you don't have to do this forever. You just want to practice doing this until you feel more confident choosing news sources for yourself and being able to identify the facts out of those news sources, as opposed to the opinion or the commentary.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 15:05

So I told this person all of these things. I explained Tori Nelson and her background, I explained Ad Fontes Media and

how to choose these different media sources, and she said, "Oh my gosh, that's a good idea. I never thought about doing that. Great advice," And we moved on. Well, a few months later, we had the exact same conversation, like, to a T. It was kind of uncanny. And I was thinking, "Does she not remember having this conversation already? But okay, I'll go with it." So we had the same conversation. And you know what? I told her the same thing. I explained Tori Nelson from KidNuz, I explained Ad Fontes Media, I explained how to choose different news outlets that you feel like are left, center, and right, and all of those different things. And at the end of it, she said, "Wait. We've talked about this before, haven't we?" So that is a reminder to you that just because you confront someone about their white privilege, it doesn't mean that they're going to act on it, and that when it comes up again, we just have to continue to have these conversations and put the ball in their court so that they hopefully will finally be willing to take action.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 16:16

And I want to say that I know these conversations take time. And I hope that you will view this time as an investment in your anti-racist journey and in the journey of the person that you are having the conversation with. You're both on this journey together, and you're helping one another move along the path. Okay, so the second example of white privilege that I have seen in the last week is touching whatever you want. Like, putting your hands wherever the heck you feel like it, that is definitely white privilege. Because I can tell you as a Black person, I have never been able to put my hands wherever I want, whether it be in the store, or on another person, or when I have interactions with the police. Definitely not a situation where I can put my hands wherever I want. Let me give you an example so you have a better idea of what I'm talking about. Of course, the first thing I have to say is hair. Black hair, specifically Black hair. I hope that everyone knows by now that you should not be putting your hands on Black people's hair. It's inappropriate. It is very uncomfortable for us. It makes us feel like animals in a zoo. It makes us feel like objects. It is very dehumanizing. And on top of that, we spend a lot of time, energy, and money on making our hair look absolutely fabulous, so please don't touch it. Like, just don't touch it. So of course, that's a very broad example. But let me give you like a more specific example that I just saw the other day. Last weekend, we were at the Heard Museum, which is a museum of Indigenous culture and art here in Arizona. And it was an Indigenous Peoples' Day celebration. And they had food, they had music, they had artists. And one of the artists that we saw was a man named James Johnson. He's killing it. And he is a woodcarver and a painter. Oh my gosh, his art was absolutely breathtaking. It was so beautiful. It was so intricate, the wood carving. I was like, "How is he doing this?" And he was sitting there, and he was actually carving something right in front of everybody. So he had his art pieces sitting on the table that he had already completed, but he was working on something right in his lap. And I want to read you something that he wrote on his website. He said, "The Tlingit art form is thousands of years old, created by my ancestors in Southeast Alaska. My ancestors placed this gift into my hands, I've dedicated my life to perpetuating the Tlingit art form. Whether I chose this, or it chose me, this is my true purpose with what I'm supposed to be doing with my life." End quote. Wow, that's really powerful, right? Like his art is a piece of his heritage. It's a piece of himself. It's a piece of his ancestors. It was...oh, it was so beautiful. So with that background and understanding the sacred nature of this artist and his art, I have to tell you what happened. So he's sitting there, he's carving this piece of art, and this white woman comes up to him and literally takes it out of his hands. She just grabs it. She picks it up, takes it out of his hands. I was like so shocked. First of all, he's holding a knife. He is woodcarving. Like what are you doing? That's pretty dangerous. And second of all, what, like, this is sacred and you're just taking it away from him. Especially considering what we know about white people snatching things from Indigenous people. This was not a good look. Not a good look at all. Like, can you imagine going to a museum and just picking things up? just picking up whatever you want? No, we don't do that, because we value those things, and we don't want anything to happen to them. So I want you to think, what message does this send? When you think that you can pick up his artwork? Do you think that this artist feels like you value his work when you just come and pick it up without asking? Now, I didn't talk to him about this. I don't know if he's okay with people touching his artwork, but at the very least, she should have asked. I just felt like the whole thing was so illustrative of the historical and present day relationship that white people have with Indigenous people. At this event, where we are supposed to be celebrating Indigenous people, like, it was, it was just mind blowing. Honestly, I didn't say anything, because I was so shocked. Like, I could not believe what I was seeing, but if I hadn't been so taken aback, I definitely would have said something.



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Jasmine Bradshaw 21:07

So let me tell you how you can spend your privilege in this situation, especially if you hold white privilege. So the first thing I would do is just say something really simple, like, "I don't think we should be touching that." And when you use the word "we," it helps the person recognize that I'm talking about all of us, not just you. Like, no one should be touching that: I don't think we should be touching that. And this is something that I would have said myself, even though I don't hold white privilege. If my jaw wasn't on the floor, I would have just said to her, "We shouldn't touch that. That's not for touching." Okay, the other thing that you can do if you hold white privilege is you can use your body as a guide for the people around you. So if she was reaching out to touch it, and she hadn't already touched it, if she was reaching out to touch one of his pieces of artwork, if you are a white person, you can use your body and put yourself in between the person and the thing that they're trying to touch. I think of it like, you know, when a bee is buzzing around your head, and you're a little bit nervous, because you don't want to get stung by the bee but you know that if you go too fast, you're gonna freak the bee out. So you kind of just guide it away gently with your hand. That is what I would do. I would just kind of put your arm or your hand right in between the person and the art, or the person and whatever the thing is that they're touching that they're not supposed to be touching, and say, "Hey, this is not for touching." It might be a little awkward, but you have to really consider your responsibility in this situation as one of the people who holds power. I mean, thinking about this Tlingit artist, James Johnson, he's sitting there, he's trying to display his art, he's trying to build his business, he's trying to sell his art, and he shouldn't have to confront people who are coming up and displaying white privilege all over the place. So spend your white privilege by saying something or using your body as a barrier.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 23:11

Now, when it comes to white people touching black people's hair, it's the same situation. You need to just tell them, "We should not touch by people's hair." You can also point them to a book, there's an entire book about it. It's called "Don't Touch My Hair" by Sharee Miller, and I will link the book in our bookshop account in the show notes. And if you haven't heard, Bookshop is just an online bookstore, where your purchases go to support independent bookstores. So we have created a ton of great book lists on our Bookshop account, and that will be linked in the show notes. But when it comes to white people touching Black people's hair, just tell them just tell them, "Do not touch black people's hair. Here's a book that you can read about why we should not be touching Black people's hair."

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 23:58

Okay, the third and final example that I want to talk to you about today is pretty egregious. Hmm. This one gets me real hot, because I have seen, and I know you have, too, a lot of white people comparing COVID restrictions to the experiences of Black people during Jim Crow segregation. It's hard to know where to even start with this one because it's so ridiculous, but I've seen it enough times that I felt like we needed to talk about it. And the frustrating thing about this is that it seems like a lot of the people who are doing these things are also the people who are against anti-racism. So I don't really understand how you can compare yourself to something that you say doesn't need to be dealt with...but that's another issue for another day. Okay, so let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. I have an exact quote from Instagram, you know I do, because I always have those receipts. It was a nurse who didn't want to get a COVID vaccine, so her employer told her that she wasn't allowed to eat her lunch inside, because everyone else was vaccinated, and so she had to go outside to eat her lunch, and she was not happy about it. I'm not gonna read you the whole post, but in it she says, quote, "I genuinely can't believe someone could make a policy like this and then actually carry it out. A policy of segregation and discrimination based on medical

choice. Someone might as well make a sign for over my table that says unvaxxed individuals only." End quote. Barf, barf. Super barf! Like this is so, so wild that people are talking about COVID restrictions and comparing it to the plight of Black people. Oh my gosh.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 25:48

Okay, so let's talk about how you can spend your privilege in this situation. Spending your privilege would look like confronting the person, and I think I would do that by asking them questions. I think when you ask someone questions, and they have to explain themselves, they can kind of start to see how ridiculous they're being. So I would start by saying something like, "Why are you comparing this situation to the way that the Black community has been systemically marginalized since before the founding of our country," and leave it at that. "Why are you doing this?" Start with "Why? What is the purpose? Why do you feel like you need to make this comparison?" The other thing I would say is, "Do you think this situation is different because you're making a choice, and people don't choose their skin color?"

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Jasmine Bradshaw 26:36

Now, this is where you have to be careful, and we've talked about this in the past—we need to make sure we're not saying that racism is because of people's skin color. Racism is because of power and money, and the people at the top who hold the most power and money wanting to remain at the top. So we don't want to say that Black people have been treated badly because of the color of their skin. We want to say that Black people have been treated badly because of the systems that are in place that keep them oppressed. But it's so important that we point out that she chose not to get a vaccine, and that Black people do not choose their skin color, just as they don't choose the oppression that they face because of the racial category that they have been put into. So I would just start by asking this person, a few simple questions, and seeing if they can explain themselves. A lot of times when people start to explain themselves, you will see the wheels turning in their head, when they realize that what they're saying is not okay. And sometimes they'll dig themselves into a deeper hole, but other times they'll come out of it and say, "Oh my gosh, yeah, I really shouldn't be doing that."

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Jasmine Bradshaw 27:44

Now, I do have to tell you that I wanted to go into the way that people's responses to COVID have shown their alliance to white supremacy culture, but then we'd be here for another, like, 30 minutes. So I decided to save that episode for another day. But I want to leave you thinking about that. Think about, percolate on, can you see the connection between COVID responses and people who embrace white supremacy.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 28:13

Okay, those are three examples of white privilege that I have seen in the last few weeks, and how you as a person who holds white privilege can respond to them and spend your privilege. I think one of the main things that I hope you take away from this episode is that spending your privilege often looks like telling other people what you've learned, and then inviting them to learn more. And the other part of it is redistributing your resources to be in solidarity with marginalized communities. I mean, when you are confronting someone who holds white privilege and giving them an opportunity to learn more, that opportunity should be learning more from people of color. So like I said, when a white person is touching a Black person's hair and you suggest the book, "Don't Touch My Hair" that is written by a black person, consider taking the resources that you have and purchasing the book for that person and giving it right to them, or finding ways that you can monetarily support Indigenous artists and the preservation of

Indigenous history, or investing in yourself and your family and your anti-racist journey by enrolling in Ally Elementary. Like I said, This episode was an adult version, an adult overview of privilege and white privilege and how you can respond, but this is something that we go deep into in Ally Elementary. We have an entire lesson where we talk about privilege, identify our privileges, and then talk about how we can spend those privileges. So make sure that you get on the Ally Elementary waitlist. I cannot wait to open the doors on October 26. And if you get on the waitlist you will have access to early bird pricing, and you will know right when the doors open so that you can claim your spot. So go to [firstnamebasis.org/waitlist](http://firstnamebasis.org/waitlist) or just visit the link in the show notes.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 30:06

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](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.