0:00:01.7 Darin Dorsey: Welcome to Resource on the Go, a podcast from the a National Sexual Violence Resource Center on understanding responding to and preventing sexual violence and sexual assault. My name is Darin Dorsey, I'm an expert in sexual violence prevention and organizational equity, and co-founder of Rooting Movements, which is a consulting firm that helps organizations ensure that their internal practices are consistent with the values that drive the change they intend to make in society. In this podcast series, I'm speaking with Black leaders, advocates, and movement workers about their experiences in the movement to end gender-based violence.

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0:00:58.0 DD: Today, we're speaking with Michelle Osborne. Michelle Osborne is an expert in sexual and domestic violence prevention and response. She's a former trial lawyer and an expert in racial equity. She has a deep, extensive knowledge of the history of the movement to end gender-based violence and the role of Black communities and Black women in that history. I'm excited to talk to Michelle. We'll definitely be making connections between that history and where the movement is at today. So Michelle Osborne, thank you so much for joining me today and having this conversation with me in this podcast about anti-blackness and the movement to end gender-based violence. To kind of get started, can you tell us a little bit about who you are and what your role is in the movement to end gender-based violence?

0:01:54.8 Michelle Osborne: Thank you, Darin. I really appreciate this opportunity. Thank you so much for inviting me. I am a woman who has probably been doing the work of trying to end violence against women and children and their families, particularly in the Black community since, I'll take a deep breath. I'll say the 1980s. And by that, I mean that I started out as a young woman in college who was really looking at misogyny and patriarchy and looking at what we would now call White Supremacy, but back then we were just calling racism, and I was really intrigued by how unfairly so much of this landed on Black women as well. So I was really looking at that incredible additional burden long before I heard of KimberlÃ© Crenshaw's intersectionality analysis which makes so much sense to me. But as a young woman in college, I was really trying to see how can I make my way through this by calling on the traditions of Black women strength and survival, Black women's liberation movements, including liberation movements during slavery times. So my initial heroes, not just my modern heroes, but they also included Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, and I saw Sojourner Truth, having gone to the 1851 Ohio Women's Convention and making that famous speech, "Ain't I a woman?" as was later characterized as a sort of leading that banner starting in the 19th century, before the Civil War, and something that I needed to pay attention to as a young woman in the '80s, trying to figure out this work war world.

0:03:41.6 MO: I became a lawyer, went to law school, became a lawyer. And interestingly, my first work as a lawyer was to be a prosecutor. I wanted to be able to stand up in court every time, know my stuff cold and be able to say, This is Justice that isn't justice. I can do justice. And it turns out, of course, that that was foolishness on my part because what I forgot was that I was going to be a prosecutor in what was basically an all-white male field even then, and I ended up in a county that you may have heard of Darin, Riverside County, California, that had very few women prosecutors and only one judge who was a woman on the entire bench in Riverside. And I say this because in the end, I was punished for some of the positions that I took, I was anti-death penalty, for instance, and I would talk about how it landed

unfairly on Black and Brown men, and that it was arbitrary. That landed me in punishment ville, which was sex crimes, which was really positive for me because now I could work with survivors, women and children of crimes that were pretty much neglected by law enforcement and the DA's office. Luckily, I did have a mentor who helped me understand the dynamics of these kinds of crimes, and so I thought that what I was doing there was learning how to both protect survivors and to also learn how to...

0:05:09.4 MO: End the injustice of violence, so I began to get involved in domestic violence organizations that continued when I moved to Los Angeles and continued again when I moved to the Bay Area of San Francisco. I ended up being on the board of the first domestic violence shelter for women in San Francisco, La Casa de las Madres, and later worked for a domestic organization in the East Bay that was very comprehensive, and they even had money to do a research project to figure out... We serve a lot of women, but we're not serving women from the African-American, Chinese-American, Korean American, Vietnamese-American or Latinx Latino communities. Why is that? Well, I was hired to do research to help them figure that out. Through all of that, I was doing racial equity work, although again, it was called at that time against racism work, and then finally I was the director of a rape crisis center in Silicon Valley for a number of years before I moved back to my hometown of Seattle. So that's how I got started in this movement, and so that's a period of... If I said late '80s or, Oh my gosh, it's been a while. It's been a while.

0:06:25.1 DD: I have to follow up on... I'm sure there are a number of things to follow up there, but the one thing that... One of the things that really sticks out is that your punishment was to go to the sex crimes unit of the prosecutor's office, and I think that says a lot about how folks see this process of accountability for these particular crimes around gender-based violence. I wonder if... And I don't know if either of us have this answer, but I wonder if there's been a change in that dynamic, or does it continue to be, that's where people are punished or that's where the kind of a less high profile prosecutors go.

0:07:09.8 MO: Yeah, I think that's a great question, and I would say to you that there's been some movement of it being seen as a more serious professional unit, both in sex crimes for law enforcement and "sex crime," and put quote marks around it, for prosecutor's offices. And there's been more of, I think, a kind of specialty that's been happening rather than seeing it as a punishment that you send people to when they haven't been behaving. But what's interesting is that you still see it being not necessarily the most vaunted unit in law enforcement, or procedural agencies. In other words, those are still... The murder divisions are seen as high profile and as significant and important. What I think I've been seeing around the country as I occasionally take a look at this as people are skilled, more skilled now in doing sex crimes work when they actually go to trial, but I wouldn't say that these cases are still going to trial, or that these cases are still even being submitted to the DA's office in the numbers that we know they're now being reported in. So let me back up a moment, we know that more crimes, sex crimes, sexual violence crimes happen that are ever reported to law enforcement, so we know that, but those that are reported to law enforcement, we know that law enforcement still has a problem in fully investigating and then sending charges onto the DA's office, so we know there's a drop-off there, even when cases are reported.

0:08:48.3 MO: We next know that when the DA gets the case from law enforcement, they reject a large amount of them or decline to proceed on them or even knock them down to something that's not necessarily a sexual violence-related charge, like something that might have been some kind of sexual assault becomes some kind of a... Just a regular old assault and battery. I'm speaking very generally, of course, I'm not gonna use figures here to prove that point, I'm speaking more anecdotally. What have I seen over the years? I do wanna give one example. In 2016, the Seattle Times did a really interesting investigative piece that showed that the Sex Crimes Division of the Seattle Police Department was doing a terrible job of investigating sex crimes that were brought to its attention, such a bad job that they had dropped off in their figures of completing their sex crimes investigations, and were sending almost no crimes over to the King County District Attorney's Office for prosecution. It became an issue, and I think you link that to what we know about the rape kits that were not being processed for decades in this country, across this country, and virtually every jurisdiction, and I think you can see why I'm saying there's been movement to understand these crimes better and to actually try to maybe investigate them and even occasionally prosecute them, but the movement is not as great as it should be.

0:10:17.5 DD: Right, great, thank you for that... For that context, I think a lot of folks advocates, folks listening to this will benefit from hearing that side of this. That side of that process.

0:10:28.9 MO: Remember, if we are asking people who have been victimized through sexual violence to report to law enforcement, do they not deserve to have their cases taken seriously, to have them investigated and in fact to have them moved on to the district attorney's office where the real prosecution of crime happens, whether through a plea or through trials? So the question is, if we're saying, "Go to law enforcement and tell them what happened," shouldn't they be given that support of justice in their favor, being at least the system being worked in that favor, what... No matter what the outcome. And I would say that that's not what's happening.

0:11:13.7 DD: Yeah, absolutely, and I can attest to that from my experience doing hospital advocacy, and then coordinating a Sexual Assault Response team in a community with law enforcement and other parties that would be involved in a reported sexual assault, and the numbers were... The numbers of calls that we went on versus cases that would then go to prosecution were just... It was a very stark number and an unfortunate situation.

0:11:48.8 MO: Darin, yeah. We know that even with the advent of Me Too, hashtag MeToo, that has not changed significantly.

0:11:55.6 DD: No, no, and I know in my experience, I think a lot of states have created the opportunity for survivors to go to the hospital, get a kit done and not report, which I think is a reflection on the fact that a lot of the times law enforcement does not do with these cases, what the survivor might wanna see, and so they presented that option. I've also... In this work, I've seen push back against that from law enforcement, saying, Hey, we need to know about all these cases, but at the same time, they're not actually acting on them in a way that is supportive of survivors.

0:12:34.9 MO: And that is something that hasn't changed that much.

0:12:37.7 DD: No, unfortunately. Yeah, unfortunately, that's an area that we definitely have a lot of movement to make, and I would be really interested in policy changes that would affect the root causes of that, because I think we've done some policy changes such as making sure that rape kits are processed, but if they're being processed, that doesn't quite... That's one aspect of the equation, and if the case isn't being looked into, investigated, etcetera, then that doesn't bring us anywhere, so would love to see some of those root causes be addressed.

0:13:18.5 MO: Yes.

0:13:18.7 DD: So in your work, as you told us in your introduction, your connections to the history of Black women combating and resisting sexual violence, you focus on a lot of the history of this movement, and specifically the role of women of color and Black women in this work, can you tell us a little bit about why this is your focus?

0:13:43.8 MO: Yes. Because it seems to me that for us to ignore the work that Black women and women of color have been doing for the centuries against this work that has laid the foundation of the modern gender violence, ending gender violence movement would be once again to erase history, which we find it happens so much for Black people, for Black women, for other communities of color, including Native American and Indigenous communities, including Latinx, Latino communities, and including Asian and Pacific Islander communities. We have seen so much erasure, but of these communities involvement in this work and yet we have also seen their actual contributions used without, if you will, giving credit. So it's always really important for me to dig down to how did we get here? How can I find people who look like me and were in the movement ahead of me as people that I can use for my strength, for my encouragement and support and going forward in doing what is incredibly difficult, and often as you know, Darin, soul training work. So I wanted to know who were the Black foremothers of this movement, who were the foremothers of color who were doing this work, even if their names, for whatever reason, aren't being given credit, I'm gonna try and find them, and I'm gonna help use what they have given to support me to go forward.

0:15:19.6 MO: So it became very important for me to know that it wasn't just Harriet Tubman, it wasn't just Sojourner Truth who were trying to end this type of violence against Black women, and of course, all women benefit when Black women's violence ends, but I found Ida B. Wells, whom I knew as someone who worked against the Lynch Law Movement or a time period of the United States. Her movement to end lynching also was about ending violence against Black women, including sexualized violence, because we know that Black women were also lynched, and we know that many times they were raped and brutalized before the lynching. So Ida B. Wells became someone that I became really, really interested in knowing more about with her work, but it began to roll forward, I learned about Fannie Lou Hamer, not just her incredible civil rights work, but her work having to do with Black women's bodies being violated through unasked for sterilization, which she called the Mississippi Appendectomy. A Black woman goes in to get medical help, if at all, with maybe abdominal or other issues, goes in for an appendectomy, comes out with her a hysterectomy that she wasn't told that she was going to get, and certainly didn't want.

0:16:40.8 MO: So I was learning about other women, I think everybody's now is beginning to know that Rosa Parks just didn't sit in the back of that bus one day saying I'm too tired, or the front of the bus, I'm too tired of not

moving to the back of the bus, that actually she was a field secretary for the NAACP and investigated rapes against Black women in the South. So as I began to look at this, and I began to look at the work that Black women had been doing to end this type of violence against our bodies, I began to look at the modern movement and go, Wait a minute, you know, I know things like Aileen Hernandez, a Black woman who was the first Black president of the National Organization for Women in 1971. Well, how did she come to be involved in that liberation movement, what did she think she could offer as a Black woman, and ultimately what happened to her inside now, National Organization for Women.

0:17:36.1 MO: So I began to look at what Shirley Chisholm was saying about the burdens that Black women carry, including burdens of fighting off violence, even as we're trying to do good work, and as I continue to look at that and try and, let me call it right-size the history, enhance and enrich the history of this movement, I was also looking at the intellectuals at the movement, like Angela Davis, or Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde. I was looking at their contributions and how people both listen to that within the movement and also discount contributions by Black women and Brown women, so it became very important for me to make sure that we didn't allow that to be erased. We didn't allow the history of Black women's achievements and contributions to dissipate and to disappear.

0:18:29.0 DD: Yeah, actually, that reminds me of another podcast that I had with another guest, who's a Black woman. And she talked about how when she came to a new organization a few years ago, people would say, "Hey, welcome to this movement." And she's like, "I've been doing this work my entire life." But we tend to see it in this very specific way of like, "Oh, you work in an organization or you're an academic that studies this or something like that that allows someone to be a part of this movement," and often, then that discounts. I don't think a lot of people see Henrietta Lacks as a part of this movement as a part of, you know, the context of gender-based violence.

0:19:19.2 DD: And that, I think, connects to a question that I have, is that when you look at this movement from a historical perspective, funders and government institutions influence over how resources are allocated and what the best practices are, etcetera, that has grown very quickly. It's actually quite recent that we've had this... That we've often, in some cases, followed the lead of funders of government organizations, of the CDC and these other institutions. And just to highlight that this movement did come from folks, Kitchen Tables. Like this movement did come from that organizing, that work that Ida B. Wells did, and I can't remember exactly what the groups were called, but creating women's groups that women would just join and organize with them. What's the impact of this change and how can these funders, these government organizations work to ensure that community-based organizations are the ones that are leading this work?

0:20:27.4 MO: That's such a great question, Darin, and you're right. It holds a lot of history within it about what Black women had to do to make sure that we were not just protecting each other and supporting and saving each other from violence and often violence from outside our community. I only have to mention, of course, Tulsa, right? Which people feel they've learned about in the last few years, but which many Black folks across this country have known about since it happened. And it's been a part of our history, of how we both are under attack by mainstream community, but also how we protect and save and remember and in not forgetting, continue to forge new ways in which we survive. So your question goes to, I think, a couple of things. Let me see if

I can start from one place. I think one of the things you were talking about was sort of the Black women's sorority, if you will, Sisterhood Movements. And a lot of those movements were about service within the community and supporting women who were professionalizing, for instance, going to college, coming back with degrees in sociology, degrees in nursing, or certifications in nursing, trying to support what these women were bringing back to the community to strengthen and keep safe the community. And so, for instance, my mother was a nurse, belonged to the Mary Mahoney Professional Nurses Association, which is a Black nurses association that is many decades old.

0:22:08.8 MO: And that in Seattle, our chapter gives out scholarship money to young Black women and men who are in the nursing profession. So those types of organizations were another way to keep ourselves safe. You mentioned Henrietta Lacks, which I think some people know the story of through her HeLa Cells. Her immortal cells, which have been used for research all around the world in all sorts of medical and pharmaceutical practices since the cells were taken from her body when she was being treated for cancer at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore in 1951. And how she did not know, of course, that her cells were... That something more was happening to them than just being taken to the pathology lab, that they were being shared with doctors and scientists across the country. She was never compensated, nor was her family compensated. They didn't even know the ways in which her cells were being commercialized. So that idea of the Black woman's body being used and not compensated takes us also back again to research done on Black bodies, particularly during the 19th century. We know that America and internationally, the modern Gynecology and Obstetrics practice in medicine was based on research of enslaved Black women by a particular doctor in the south, his name I will not name because I don't wish to give him that credit, but he was doing surgeries on these women, practice surgeries, experimental surgery without anesthesia.

0:23:41.6 MO: And so we all benefit from those women who suffered horribly. But when I say that, what I wanna do is try and draw a parallel with what you were talking about with respect to funding, and that is this. As you said, communities worked hard to make sure that they survived, and were as healthy as possible despite this kind of violence. And there were so many organizations, DV and Sexual Assault Prevention and Intervention Organizations that started from the Kitchen Tables, started from a group of women saying, "You know, we gotta save each other from this violence that's happening, let's secretly take and hide women who were suffering this violence, let's comfort women who've been survivors of sexual assault," etcetera, even though the authorities don't wanna hear from them. As these organizations began to grow, they needed money to grow and to have better resources and funders often stepped in with the sense of, "We've got to help these women, helping these women helps our community."

0:24:43.6 MO: But what we began to see a few years into this was that these peer group or community-based organizations were getting demands from funders to become professional. They needed to professionalize before funders could feel safe giving enormous amounts of money to them. So they wanted to see people in charge who were accountants or who were psychologists or social workers, or knew how to not only take the money, but to use it in a way that would not only benefit the community, but would make the funders feel confident that they weren't just throwing their money away, and that movement to professionalize the movement meant that many grassroots community and peer group organizations got pushed aside by bigger professionalized organizations coming in.

0:25:36.0 MO: I won't name names, but in the county where I live, which is the county that holds Seattle, there are at least two organizations I can think of that sort of professionalized domestic violence and sexual assault, smaller grassroots organizations out of existence in the last 25 years. And so what that means is we've lost voices at the table, we've lost voices of more marginalized communities, meaning Black communities, Latinx communities, immigrant communities of color, their voices have been subsumed in the larger idea of these professionalized DV and sexual assault organizations. I am not criticizing those organizations per se, I'm simply saying that when funders are offering money, people are thinking, What do we need to do to get the money, and if we can do it right, then we're still helping and saving our communities, but what we may be doing is also saying, and if we have to kinda not hear some voices to get this money, that's probably a good trade-off, and that happens unconsciously, but what it means is that we have communities that are not being appropriately served by the very monies that are supposed to help resource them.

0:26:49.3 DD: Right, and I think one thing that's really important to highlight in this conversation is that there have always been voices that challenge these practices, that said, Hey, we're getting a little bit too close to the government, we're getting a little bit too close to professionalization to these systems, for example, the Carceral system. I often, in my work, highlight a scene by Mariame Kaba, that highlights a letter in 1977 that came from the Santa Cruz Women Against Rape, that essentially warns the field, hey, the anti-rape movement is getting way too close to law enforcement and these carceral approaches. And one thing that I think of that I just wanna highlight and kind of get your response to is, can we imagine what this movement would be today if we had listened to those folks then? Because now we're going back, now, folks, we saw the Moment of Truth letter in the summer of 2020, where state coalition said, Hey, we've bought into this approach, it's been harmful, we're going to change this. And now we're going back and listening to some of these folks, but how do we listen to them? Had we not gone in this direction of professionalization, or at least not as far and deeply in this direction, can you just imagine where we'd be today?

0:28:17.8 MO: Yeah, and it's painful to think about that because that question also says, And wouldn't we have more Black women and women of color in leadership in these organizations and coalitions, and wouldn't we have more Black men and men of color in positions within these organizations as well, and wouldn't we have basically attacked the dynamics of sexual violence and intimate partner violence in this society much, much better if we hadn't had to align with the interest of funders? And when we say that, we're talking a lot about governmental funders, but I do wanna go back to your point of law enforcement. I can remember before I left California to move back to my hometown is Seattle, and I had been directing Rape Crisis Center, and then I went to a family services organization where I worked with a lot of street and un-housed youth. And what I was hearing when I was working with young women who wanted to be examined after sexual assault or after violence done to their bodies, this is generally in the San Jose area, I was hearing... Yeah, but I'm not gonna go because I'm required to cooperate with the police if I go and I don't wanna do that.

0:29:34.2 MO: I don't wanna get into the police system, I don't want people challenging my bodily integrity. I don't want them to challenge how I raise my kids, which becomes an issue particularly for women of color and Black

women about... You begin to get into the system, you go to the system for help, and suddenly you are in the system, and the system isn't helping you, the system is taking away your kids, the system is looking to incarcerate you, as you suggest, and so this idea was beginning to be put into laws, rules and regulations for domestic violence and sexual assault organizations. We could only hope... We can only help a survivor so far, and if they weren't cooperating, if they weren't submitting to the police, cooperating with the police, then we're not gonna help them. There was a point where women could not get rape kits unless they agreed to have their cases prosecuted, and I've talked to some about how so often that was an empty promise, but they were going through this process knowing that it wasn't right for them to do it in the way that law enforcement wanted, and yet they wanted that medical care and support, and that was the way to get it.

0:30:45.4 MO: So these bargains, if you will, that we made really close out a lot of other avenues of how we could have progressed in working to end violence, instead we got caught up in making sure we were dotting I's and crossing T's for funding, rather than doing visionary more creative work. So I agree with you that the writing was on the wall many, many, many years ago, and yet the movement largely went in a different direction, it followed the money. And that is so much about what American society is about. If you want to do good work, at some point, you've got to make that decision, Do I take the money that's being offered, or do I find other ways to support, and resource, and build capacity for what I and my peers are trying to accomplish?

0:31:38.4 DD: Right, exactly. So I wanna ask a little bit more about your own experiences in this movement. I know you've worked with a number of organizations at all levels, from advocacy to leadership, to being a prosecutor, as a Black woman in this movement, what stayed the same for you as you've served in different roles and different organizations?

0:32:05.4 MO: Yeah, I'm gonna... Can I give you a positive and a negative?

0:32:09.3 DD: Yes, definitely, absolutely.

0:32:11.9 MO: So I'll start with a negative, so I can try and land on a positive note. But the negative that has stayed the same is the idea that Black women are good for being on the front lines of the work, so they're good for doing shelter work, right, they're good for working directly with clients who've just come off the street into the organization looking for support and help. That's what they're good for. But for somehow we don't think that we need to be nurturing or supporting Black women doing this work, and I don't wanna leave out my sisters of color, but I really wanna talk about what happens for Black women as I've seen it in this movement. We are really not good at saying, You can also be trainers, you can be managers and supervisors, you could be executive directors and you can be CEOs, you can be visionary in this movement, you can lead in this movement, whether regionally, or state-wide, or nationwide, internationally, we're not good at saying that to Black women, 'cause we actually don't really believe it.

0:33:23.8 MO: Why don't we believe it? Black women, as I keep arguing, the work and research that I've done have been, not just contributing to the movement, but have been leading the movement in many ways for more than 200 years, and yet we are seen as either newcomers to it or not very well-versed, or we're just not gonna be successful. So that has not changed in terms of what I've seen in this movement, even though we have actually become aware of

it, we talk about it as a movement, we talk about racial equity, we talk about uplifting our Black staff, etcetera, all those trainings that everybody's had about diversity and equity and inclusion, and all that talk about micro-aggressions and all that talk about uplifting and praising our Black sisters and colleagues, it's a lot of talk 'cause we're not really...

0:34:17.2 MO: I use the word we, when I say we, we're not serious about it in this movement. But the thing that I also want to say that I have seen that is good is that Black women and brown women have not been stopped from continuing to be deeply involved in the movement, in saving our own lives and saving our own communities, and continuing to point out the contradictions of organizations that want to end violence and yet perpetuate, if you will, the cycles of abuse. In other words, the cycles of emotional abuse, the cycles that are about gaslighting staff of color and community members of color who are asking for help. I think a lot of folks, for instance, doing DV work, or their shelter work will tell you, Black women and men will tell you, doing this work, when we're doing a case study and we're starting to talk about a particular client of the organization, yeah, we can pretty much tell if they're talking about a client who isn't white because of the way people talk about them. So that was true when I was doing this work in the '80s, and it's true in 2022. This is one of the things that has stayed the same, but here's the great thing, we have so many more abilities to speak up and say, Whoa, stop. You're doing a completely racist against the values of this organization, analysis of a client because they are a client of color, the ability to say that has increased greatly. And that is important.

0:35:49.5 DD: Definitely, and I think we certainly see more transparency with folks having more avenues to bring these issues to light. One phrase that comes to mind in response to that positive aspect, that positive experience that you've seen, is the phrase, by any means necessary. Because I have seen Black women go through some stuff in this movement and somehow get out the other end and somehow continue to do this work, by any means necessary, and I'm glad that you're highlighting that piece because it really is incredible. It's unfortunate. And it's incredible.

0:36:31.9 MO: It is incredible, and I do think, Darin, thank you, for the by any means necessary, which is what we've always had to do, because that is part of survival, and part of... One Black women's survival is the survival of the community, is the survival of all of us. And we know too that when we survive then other people are surviving, other people are doing better because we are surviving. It's interesting, other people are doing better when we're just surviving. They're thriving, right?

0:37:04.0 MO: But when we thrive, which goes back to your question of what would the movement have looked like if we had listened to basically what Black women and women of color were saying? What would the movement have looked like? Then we would all have been thriving and beyond, so that is both a loss. This is always the loss that a lot of people don't understand, there's a loss when you suppress and oppress and use violence against communities like Black communities, you lose brilliance, you lose wisdom, you lose the ability for everyone's lives to improve. But the thing about the Black community, just as the Native American Indigenous communities keep proving, is that we're not going anywhere, we are still here, and we are continuing to make sure that we are still here and that our voices are uplifted and people are hearing those voices. The next issue, what are you gonna do when you hear the voice of the person who's been marginalized? And that is the issue that the movement continues to struggle with.

0:38:05.0 DD: Exactly, exactly. And on that note, a lot of organizations have in some way recognize these issues, and particularly in 2020, and in the Summer of 2020, we saw, not only organizations in this movement, but across the entire United States and even abroad, making commitments to supporting Black Lives Matter to implementing anti-racism within their organizations, and all of these various commitments that were made to addressing systemic racism, and sometimes specifically around interrupting anti-blackness, which is not a conversation that has not been mainstreamed for very long, but I think more and more people are starting to hear this term anti-blackness, and understand that it's a very important distinction when we're talking about racism, to talk about how racism plays out in different communities. My question for you is what do you think organizations that want to move in this direction need to know and understand?

0:39:14.2 MO: Oh, well, that's a very profound conversation. [chuckle] Because I think the first thing that a lot of these organizations... And let me make sure I'm clear with you, Darin. Are you talking about organizations that are largely white and white-led, but are trying to serve a diverse range of communities, including Black communities and other communities of color? Okay, just so we're clear.

0:39:37.2 DD: Yes, I think so. Yes.

0:39:37.8 MO: 'Cause what I would say is that for a lot of these organizations, they think that they want to do this work, but they do not realize how hard the work is, they do not understand that it is intentional, that it means shifting the paradigms of their understanding, that they actually have to uncover what their unconscious understandings are about race are, and about violence. A lot of these organizations are also still steep, not just in systemic racism, of course, but in patriarchy misogyny. It is amazing how many sexual assault intervention and prevention organizations and domestic violence organizations have patriarchal misogynistic ways of providing service, determining who's worthy of service, who should get service, what's our emphasis, what's our priority in different communities that... In our service area? So these are things that are un-grappled with and largely unexamined and explored by so many organizations. They still have a belief that if we're doing good, we're doing well for everyone, and we know that that's not true.

0:40:52.8 MO: We know that their idea of doing good often centers white women, that the best outcomes for a lot of their clients reside with white women. So the idea of them wanting to do this work really means that they have to examine profoundly how it's going to change the organization and the people who work in the organization and how it's gonna change the relationship to folks in the community, and the risk is that if they don't do it right, don't do it well, don't do it with authenticity, then they are going to lose whatever they have with the various communities they serve, they're going to lose the trust and respect, if they have it, of Black staff or staff of color, that they are going to have to make a major shift that they may not be ready for.

0:41:41.9 MO: And if I can give an example, in the fall of 2020, I was approached by a number of different white led white-centric organizations to help them with their new found racial reckoning that they wanted to do after the George Floyd murder in that summer of 2020 when America was taking a look at itself with respect to its systemic racial legacy and reality, and two of

these organizations literally wrote me back after my proposals and said, Oh, what you're offering isn't what we've wanted, we wanted to do some like... Let's look at some blind spot.

0:42:23.8 DD: Trainings.

0:42:24.4 MO: Yeah, let's do some training around applied bias, and you're talking about anti-racism and anti-Blackness, and you've got some model that this professor can... That's not what we want, but one organization even went so far as to never respond at all. And this was an organization that had said, and we not only, do we wanna do this work and we believe we're ready to do this work, but we want to be led by Black women, we are hoping that Black female consultants will put in proposals, and we will respond promptly, so I did that, and I did that with a colleague, and we have... To this day, you know who you are out there, we're still waiting to hear from you.

[laughter]

0:43:05.9 MO: We have never heard from you, and we wrote two letters, and the letters were about this, the only reason we're writing is to hold you accountable. You said in your request for proposal that you wanted to hear from us. We gave you a very fine proposal. We didn't expect you to necessarily accept it, we're sure that other Black women and other consultants put in fine proposals, but you said you would respond and let each and everyone know that you've received the proposal and what you ultimately decided. We have never heard from you. So your seriousness is, again, a slap in the face of your belief that you wanna do this work, and it's a slap in the face of Black women who took you seriously, took you at your word, trusted you to hold yourself accountable, and you haven't. So yes, the organization still exist, we've never heard from them, and I think that's an example of how hard this is for some organizations to really get right-sized about, do they wanna do this work, do they wanna change, do they want their leadership to look different at the end of the process, or their staff or the way in which they serve marginalized communities. And for many organizations, the answer ultimately is they don't know.

0:44:19.1 DD: Yeah, exactly.

0:44:20.5 MO: Which, to us, means no.

0:44:25.7 DD: And I really appreciate that perspective on the organizational level. One thing I'm curious about from your perspective is, on the individual level, the fact of the matter is that there are individuals who are writing these statements, there are individuals who have led these organizations in these directions that they're not anti-racist and thereby they are racist, that have this... They have this past of leading these organizations in this direction, and they now recognize it and they say, I wanna go in the opposite direction. One thing that I rarely see is for folks in those leadership, those powerful positions, to actually step back and say, I want us to go in this direction, and I'm not the right person to lead us there. Is that something that they... I may have seen that on one or two instances or something like that, but I feel like it's very rare, but may be a necessity if we want to move forward in this movement.

0:45:31.6 MO: I do think it's rare, and I know what you're talking about, I've been looking for that too, with all these great statements, and I say "Great" with quote marks. Coming out of 2020s racial reckoning, why haven't

we seen people say, I am no longer the right person to lead this organization with the new direction that we're taking, and our forward movement is going to be led by a person who is someone's lived experience and upon reflection is a Black person or a person that represents racialized communities, and our leadership? Our board is going to look different and be represented in those communities that we always said we wanted to serve successfully, but we weren't doing a good job at it, and part of it 'cause we weren't the right leadership to lead in that way. I have seen very little of that. And what I have seen are some people promising that their successor will likely be someone from a... We'll call it a racialized community, 'cause a lot of these folks often put it that way, racialized community, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. But what you're suggesting is the whole... Our paradigm has shifted so greatly that I've been running an organization for...

0:46:49.0 MO: We've seen people running organizations for 10, 20, 30, 40 years as the ED or CEO? We haven't really seen those people stepping back, what we said... What we've heard them say is I now, I'm going to have some advisors around me who are from communities of color. I'm gonna add a few more people of color to my board. We're going to think more carefully about how we hire and promote, but what you're talking about, the big shift, the real change in leadership, haven't really seen that.

0:47:22.5 DD: Right, and I think even this idea of committing, oh yeah, the next person is gonna be a person of color, or that we're bringing in board members and advisors to move us in this direction, it honestly makes me think of... It makes me think back to history and think of George Washington, who by all accounts, at least in my understanding, recognized that slavery was wrong, but was absolutely unwilling to experience the cost of freeing his slaves, and so he wrote it in his will, to have the people that he enslaved freed. My understanding is that didn't even happen immediately, that his wife, I believe, Martha Washington kept them enslaved for a long time, and I think oftentimes I hear people will talk about, Well, yeah our founding fathers, they didn't even believe in this stuff, but you can see the impact of what happened in the country that we live in today. As a result of the fact that they were unwilling to make those critical decisions that would have cost them their privileges, again, can you even imagine if those people who said, We believe this is wrong, we're willing to face the consequences of doing the right thing, then we might be in a better country today, and I think this is... I'll admit, this is a bit of a distant analogy, but I think similarly, if in this movement, we have people who are willing to face the consequences of doing the right thing, we will be a better movement in the long run.

0:49:12.5 MO: Yeah, I'm so glad that you say that because once again, you've taken us back to even before the founding of our country, right? The founding of our country happened some time in the 1770s. We know that slavery had begun in his country, enslavement of African people had begun in 1619, so we have almost 200 years of enslavement of Black people before we even get the real founding of our country. So you take us back to that, because what we know about the founding was that it was fraught with the discussion of, are we going to allow enslavement to continue even as we become a brand new country based on the principles of democracy and freedom? And that was a debate that happened. It wasn't as if it was completely ignored, and we know that there were drafts of the Declaration of Independence and even the constitution that tried to deal with the issue of enslavement, but the answer always came out to be what you've just suggested, Darin, it is now, which is, You know what, we're gonna go with what we like and makes us comfortable and

put the ultimate reckoning off for later. We know that enslavement is wrong, but theoretically, we also know that our democracy is being framed as an evolving process.

0:50:39.5 MO: So it's supposed to get better in the future, which means we can live with enslavement now, knowing that somewhere in the future, guys like us are gonna make the right decision and finally give up enslavement. So that's a very interesting bargain to make with history, and with the future, and with your descendants, and with the descendants of people who've been enslaved, but that was made at the outset of this country. And I just would like to say for a moment about reparations, when we think about reparations are partly payment for harm done, for a wrong done, and it's such an interesting debate that isn't really happening right now in this country.

0:51:21.8 MO: It goes in waves about reparations or I should say it isn't happening on a large scale basis, it's got taken over by another false debate, the Critical Race Theory debate. Should that happen and should it be in our schools? But what I wanna say about reparations is that when we think about reparations, we know that there are people in this country who got reparations for enslavement, and everybody is almost knowing what I'm going to say next, the people who got reparations for enslavement were white slave masters. When they lost their enslaved peoples at the end of the Civil War, they were entitled and did receive, in many instances, money for having lost their enslaved people. But enslave folks, as you know, got nothing, not even that famous 40 acres and a mule, which was a promise made by Union General to enslave people in one of the regions that he had freed during the Civil War. So the idea of reparations, if it can repay white slave masters for losing their slaves, good. Reparations for enslave people, bad. Reparations for descendants of enslaved people due to systemic racism, all these decades and I dare say a century and a half and more later for the gaps that we see and know exist in health, in incarceration, in education, in employment, etcetera, bad. If we're saying we could actually find a formula or a way in which to give reparations to those descendants of enslaved people, those modern day descendants who still are suffering under systemic racism.

0:53:13.0 MO: So remember, there was always white affirmative action. It actually has always existed, it still exists, and then there's the affirmative action that we don't like, which we say is meant to benefit Black and Brown people, and somehow it's wrong. That is related, again, to the idea that we don't wanna give up our comforts. If we are a white institution, we aren't ready for the big paradigm shift. So to go back to your question originally, I would say that one thing that organizations have to be really, really ready for is this profound, deep examination and exploration that if the paradigm shift is truly going to happen will end in a different leadership, in a different way of conducting business and services. And people aren't ready for that.

0:54:05.9 DD: Yeah, definitely. And I'm glad that you brought reparations to this conversation because I think people don't connect, this topic that we're talking about anti-blackness and the movement to end gender-based violence to the topic of reparations, and I think often we think about it in this very large way, where the United States is giving reparations to Black folks or folks that descend from people who are in slave, but the reality is that we can contribute to that in our every day lives, whether that be individually, whether that be in our household, in our schools or in our work places, and I think that definitely deserves a part of this conversation in that part of undoing racial harm that this country was founded on, this society was

founded on, is thinking in terms of reparations and bringing that to every aspect of your life. And so I'm just really glad that you brought that up, and I hope that people can maybe make that connection that doing anti-racism work in our organizations is not only addressing anti-blackness in this movement, but is more broadly addressing the harm done that has substantially shaped the direction that we've gone as a society.

0:55:32.5 MO: Thanks Darin, and which continues today, and we should understand always that this is nuanced complex work, this is not simple, dare I say it, Black and white answers. Everyone I've ever talked about reparations, who says to me, Yeah, but that amount of money. We're not talking about money alone, and that is what Darin is just referring to. We were talking about other ways in which healing in reparations in repair and restoration can happen, and the idea that each of us hold that power, and white people in particular, have anti-racist power, that they can exercise many ways in ways that they don't realize, but that they need to be aware of is very important. Darin, can I give a quick example of that?

0:56:18.8 DD: Yes, of course.

0:56:20.5 MO: This is the kind of... Okay, so thank you, this is the kind of support that can happen in an organization that can begin to change people's minds about what it is like to share power or to have others have power. I was in an organization where I was responsible for social justice work, and I happened to be saying that there were people, almost all women in the organization had been newly promoted to Directors and regional directors, and that many of them had told me that they didn't know how to prepare a budget, which was necessary as a part of their new promotion, and I was challenged on that, sort of that, well, what do you mean? Of course, if they're directors and regional directors, they know how to prepare a budget.

0:57:00.9 MO: And I said, no, a lot of these people were promoted from positions where that wasn't necessarily part of their responsibility, so can we have a training where folks learn to do a budget because it benefits the organization, it benefits the communities that each of these directors are needing to serve, etcetera? Seem very common sense to me, but I got attacked again, they wanted the name of the people who had complained that they didn't know how to do a budget, etcetera, and I'm sitting there thinking, how do I answer this? I'm a Black woman under attack, y'all, how do I answer that I'm making a reasonable statement that will benefit everyone, but particular communities we serve by having staff who know how to do budgets that will respond to the needs of the community. And just as I'm thinking again, how do I respond to this without pointing out, why am I under attack when I'm saying something reasonable, a white woman across the table says, I'm a director who doesn't know how to do a budget. I'm one of the people, Michelle's talking about.

0:58:01.8 MO: So a white woman spoke up, suddenly they listened, and the idea that the directors were untrained, didn't know how to do budget became something that needed to be resolved, but what I was looking at this woman was she used power to speak up and to affirm what I was saying. I shouldn't have had to look around the room for an ally, and actually I hadn't been. I just thought, I'm on the hot seat. How do I deal with this? But this woman saw in the moment what needed to be done, she needed to tell the truth, and she needed to support what I was saying, and she needed to help me move the whole dialogue forward. And I will never forget that. That was a powerful moment because I could have been left hanging as I often had in other

situations over the years, and that may seem like a small thing, but it was also very, very big. It built some trust, and then also built the idea that we're working together on this y'all, we're working together on this, and ultimately the communities we serve are going to be better.

0:59:02.7 DD: Right.

0:59:05.2 MO: Why can't we work together, why does it need to be someone gets hung out to dry and other people are comfortable.

0:59:11.7 DD: And what I love about that situation is that that particular person who intervened was proactive about it, they didn't wait for you to say, Hey, I'm experiencing racism here, they didn't wait for a complaint to be lodge or for it to escalate, but instead we're proactive about, let me just get in the situation to interrupt this harm that may potentially being done, and I think that's something that I often talk to organizations about, is that by default, we are so reactive when it comes to conversations around race, and we wait for the thing to happen, and then we often force, whoever it happened to to make the case that it was about race. Whereas, we can be proactive about these things and address them before they harm people.

1:00:03.9 MO: That's right. Proactive is anti-racist.

1:00:07.4 DD: Exactly, so we're just about out of time here, but I would love to ask you. How can people reach you? How can people find you, and potentially work with you.

1:00:21.4 MO: That is so kind of you. Thank you, Darin. I have to say that my social media profile is very small, but it is this. You can find me through one of my email addresses, which is Michelle, M-I-C-H-E-L-L-E.osborne O-S-B-O-R-N-E @mindspring.com, mindspring. It's a great old email address from the last century. M-I-N-D-S-P-R-I-N-G.com. Another way is to actually go to LinkedIn for those of you sometimes go to LinkedIn. I am there. I believe I'm under Michelle M Osborne. There's a picture of me though, so you'll know if you've gotten the right Michelle, I notice the other Michelle Osborne don't look like me. Not much anyway. So that's another way that you can say hi and see if we can connect up. I would love that. I think I may have one more email address, if I can give that one. It's michellem.osborne O-S-B-O-R-N-E 7, the Number 7, @gmail.com. So Michelle, M-I-C-H-E-L-L-E-M.O-S-B-O-R-N-E 7@gmail.com. So those are two email addresses and LinkedIn, and those are two ways. Thank you so much.

1:01:51.0 DD: No, thank you. And when folks reach out to you, what kind of... Can you give us a little bit of background on what kind of services you offer and how you can help organizations?

1:02:01.6 MO: Yeah, the work that I do is consulting with respect to profit and non-profit organizations, looking at leadership development with a racial equity approach. When I say racial equity, I am talking about anti-racism and anti... Excuse me, anti-patriarchal, anti-misogynistic work. I'm also talking about getting rid of anti-Black racism and going pro-Blackness in your approach to your work. Right. Pro-Black. That's a good thing, right? Look at me and Darin, we are examples of what pro-Black can look like within an organization. We're going to be analytical, we're going to be thoughtful, and we're going to be looking for solutions, we're going to be collaborative, but we're never going to say that we're going to subsume the needs of the Black

community or other marginalized communities in favor of a comfortable white aesthetic.

1:03:07.4 MO: So that is what you're going to be working with if you work with me. I believe in research, original research, I do a lot of work that is about uncovering what is happening in our organization. I do that through anonymous private and confidential surveys. I do that through private and confidential one-on-one interviews with your staff and with your board. I do that with my trainings, which I always have evaluative pieces where I reflect back what folks are learning together, and I also have a whole piece that is about strategic planning with a racial equity framework and approach. So what I'm going to be doing is a little bit different perhaps than what people have run into before, but they'll also find that it fits into an alignment of values of social justice work.

1:03:56.7 DD: That is absolutely wonderful. Those all sound like incredibly valuable services, particularly for organizations in this movement. So, y'all if you're listening to this reach out to Michelle. She'll help your organization out, help you be anti-racist. It might not be easy, but it will be effective. Thank you so much.

1:04:19.3 MO: Keep up the good work. Thank you so much, Darin.

1:04:19.4 DD: Thank you so much, Michelle.

1:04:23.2 MO: I love what you're doing in highlighting aspects of the movement, so thank you.

1:04:25.0 DD: Alright. Well, that does it for today's podcast, thank you for joining us for this conversation on anti-Blackness and the movement to end gender-based violence. We encourage you to reflect deeply on what you've heard, what you've learned today, and think about how you can implement that in your communities and your organizations. We also welcome you to reach out to some of the guests in this series of podcasts for organizational technical assistance, consulting, training and other services. If you haven't already, please do check the rest of the podcast in this series. This series of podcasts on anti-blackness and the movement to end gender-based violence includes five conversations that are five different perspectives in this movement, five different experiences. I think what you'll find is that sometimes they overlap and sometimes they don't. There's something to gather from each and every single one of them, and again, we encourage you to listen to the entire series of this podcast.

[music]