

0:00:00.9 Darin Dorsey: Welcome to resource on the go. A podcast from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center on understanding responding to and preventing sexual violence and sexual assault. My name's 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 try to, 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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0:00:57.9 DD: Today we're speaking with Valeriana Chikoti-Bandua Estes. I'm excited to interview Valeriana and I previously worked with Valeriana at the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs where she served as an executive director. Recently, her and I's experiences of anti-Blackness were reported in a Mother Jones article written by Madison Pauly titled How the mainstream Movement Against Gender-based Violence fails Black workers and survivors, in addition to a number of other Black movement workers who were also highlighted. We encourage you to check out this article and read it before listening to this podcast. Valeriana Chikoti-Bandua Estes is a former refugee from the country of Angola, she's indigenous to the Ovimbundu tribe in the Southern Region of Angola, born in the neighboring country of Zambia. Due to a bitter civil war at the age of three, Valeriana's family fled the country of Zambia and found refuge in the country of Papua New Guinea where she was subsequently raised.

0:02:10.9 DD: In 2007, she moved to the USA as an international student, and as life would have it in her quest to just obtain her bachelor's degree, the United States became her second home. She served as a human rights Diplomat in the United Nations for the country of Angola. She's a TEDx Speaker of the talk titled Protect The Girl Child. As a founder of necessary interruptions, Valeriana takes an abolitionist approach as a racial equity consultant for businesses, agencies and organizations looking to center Black liberation, operate through an anti-oppressive lens and build safer spaces for Black communities. In addition, Valeriana is the interim Executive Director at the social justice for Northwest, a newly wed, a Tacoma resident and a recent green card holder after a 13-year-long journey of navigating the labyrinth of the US immigration system.

0:03:07.9 DD: Alright, Valeriana, thank you so much for joining me for the National Sexual Violence Resource Center podcast.

0:03:13.5 Valeriana Chikoti-Bandua Estes: You're welcome.

0:03:16.1 DD: I'm super excited to chat with you today. This podcast series is about anti-Blackness in the movement to end gender-based violence, and we actually... We set up this interview, I wanna say, about a month ago.

0:03:31.4 VE: Yep, we sure did. We sure did.

0:03:32.3 DD: And between then and now, an article has come out about your experience in particular, an experience I was also present for, which was your experience at the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs. And so I'm super excited to dive into that, to dive into your experience in this movement as a Black woman, your experience of addressing anti-Blackness, and hear more about your experiences.

0:04:06.8 VE: Thank you so much, Darin. I just appreciate this opportunity and it's kind of wild that when we were mapping this out, we had no idea that this publication from obviously the Mother Jones article would come out, and so I think timing is everything clearly. And yeah, I look forward to being able to respond to the questions that are being asked today. And my hope really is for listeners who may just stumbled on the Mother Jones article, or maybe it's being widely shared within your organization, that you take a deeper look at how and why anti-Blackness often persists in specifically, I'll say, non-profit spaces. It is violent, and there are a lot of intersectionalities around it.

0:04:52.9 DD: I'm so excited to dive in. So let's jump in. My first question is, can you tell us a little bit about who you are and what has brought you to the movement to end gender-based violence?

0:05:07.4 VE: Thank you for asking. So I'll start with my name. My name is Valeriana Chikotii-Bandua Estes, I go by Estes as well, I'm newly wed. And I am a former refugee from the Republic of Angola. I'm indigenous to the Ovimbundu people group in the southern part of Angola. I was actually born in the country, neighboring the country of Zambia, and my family eventually sought refuge in Papua New Guinea near Australia where I grew up. And then I moved to United States in 2007. So I definitely have that international background, and just also being a survivor of violence very early on in my life and gender-based violence, also sexual violence, unfortunately, those levels of oppression really opened up my eyes so early on to the need to be around community spaces and folks who were centering really a survivor-centered lens. And so early on in my life, I was involved in this work, and unbeknown to me in so many respects, this work was always calling me.

0:06:23.1 VE: And so naturally, by the time I migrated to the United States, my advocacy with specifically like immigrant populations, refugee populations, really began to grow and flourish, whether it was on a college campus and in small community meetings we were having or town hall sessions, all the things, it essentially evolved in my journey and in actually moving to Washington State and actually working at Wix up.

0:06:54.1 VE: And one thing I do also want to make a mention of is that there was a period of time in my life when I saw this work more so from a diplomatic sense, and having served in that capacity as a former diplomat, I really came to that realization that as much as that position was great and that opportunity was amazing, I actually felt a huge disconnect specifically with victims and survivors of violence, just because when you serve in the aspect or the arena of diplomacy, a lot of the work is actually based in soft power. So there are policies and procedures that are created to champion survivors and victims of violence, and specifically depending on what committee you work on, and I worked in the Human Rights Committee. And it was just like a deep realization that my first love is actually working directly with folks and really having, I would say, a closer sense to the programmatic work, like what's actually taking place on the ground? Who needs to be supported, who's being left out?

0:08:07.2 VE: And also examining how anti-Blackness can even show up in those spaces as well. And I think we're seeing it right now in on the world stage, obviously as folks have been focused on what's happening in Ukraine, and then interestingly enough, in the mix of all the violence and folks who are actually refugees fleeing Ukraine and getting to other countries for safety.

What we're actually finding out or what is now showing up on news streams or platforms, is that Black survivors and victims of violence as well are not getting forms of safety, they're not being advocated for. And so I think it's just important to note how anti-Blackness shows up in such a variety of different ways. And in many respects, I think that that's what really fuels my work and what's brought me to this movement. And I've been in this movement, I would even say, for over 20 years when I think of just my own lived experiences, about all these community spaces that I was involved in early on in my life, and even now in my adulthood, and so.

0:09:15.9 VE: Something I did notice when I first came to Washington, or moved to Washington, so many people wanted to just welcome me into the movement, and I'm like, Uh, historically, I just wanna put it out there, Black folks have been involved in... Specifically, Black women have been involved in really championing the rights and just the well-being of the most vulnerable folks in community groups or populations. And I think that that disconnect, I think even early on in me arriving in Washington was just that recognition that I think there's a disconnect in the ways in which people see Black contributions, that there's been a huge erasure and it's been happening for such a long time, and it probably also speaks to why there's a default to actually center more White women in leadership or in spaces of leadership, even on boards versus like Black, indigenous, Brown and folks of color. And while I would even go as far as to say that when specifically you are a Black woman and you hold a level of power, there is a level of persecution that can come with that, and I definitely had that lived experience and I'm still in many respects, reeling but also healing from it.

0:10:36.1 DD: Yeah, that's a really, really interesting lens that I think a lot of people can hopefully benefit from and hear and integrate in their experience in this movement. One thing that I would like to follow up on is this idea that you came to Washington and folks welcomed you into the movement.

0:10:57.7 VE: Oh, yeah.

0:11:02.0 DD: That's an important point to me because I think oftentimes, people only see participation in this movement in particular ways, in organizations, in certain pathways that are legitimized or academic or something like that, where if you go back to the history, the grounding, the foundation of this movement, there weren't no organizations, there they were not, there they were not these government-funded organizations, there they were folks who were in their communities organizing, and it sounds like that's what you've been doing all your life, and when you got to Washington, folks just kind of dismissed all of that background that you brought into the... That you brought to the table.

0:11:45.6 VE: Yeah, I think, honestly, and I appreciate you asking that or even segueing to that because I think the erasure is so real in that when I think of Blackness and just Black spaces and community groups and the ways in which we have shown up for each other, it is not just a cultural nuance, it's a way of life. In that being individualistic, especially when harm takes place in our communities hasn't necessarily been the default. I think of even here we have just not that long ago years ago, where Tarana Burke was the starter of the Me Too movement, but because a White woman specifically shared that hashtag, all of a sudden folks were being enamored by her. And for a second, Tarana Burke was almost erased.

0:12:39.2 DD: It was real close. Yeah. She had to work really hard...

0:12:40.9 VE: Very, very close. Hard.

0:12:41.6 DD: To get the recognition that she needed.

0:12:43.5 VE: Exactly, and I often think of the fact that when we look at history, how often has that taken place or shape where a Black person, could be a Black man, could be a Black trans person, could be a Black woman, or someone who's even a youth member has shown up in a way in which they have contributed greatly and immensely, and the erasure takes place. And then everybody's centering some other institution and specifically like a White-led institution, and they're getting like a pat on the back and because maybe they have more avenues around funding streams that they are more legitimized.

0:13:24.8 VE: And so when I think of how structures typically take place, especially in these United States of America, around like you need to have the 501C3, you need to have all of these things in this particular order, we have to recognize that we live in a world where whiteness and specifically, White supremacy governs the ways in which we move, breathe and live.

Truthfully, if we do not name that, I think it is difficult for someone to truly recognize how and why anti-Blackness persists in those systems, because if something is not officially named in this particular way, it is dismissed. It is dismissed in mainstream organizations, and it's also dismissed when maybe somebody is in need of funds where they're like, You need to have all of these specific things, and I look at that as like just barriers that specifically exist because if you look at indigenous communities, you look at brown communities, you look at Black communities, even as you just go to the continent of Africa.

0:14:26.7 VE: One of the main themes that I have seen is just also that collectivism, gathering together, gathering with the elders and making, whether you wanna call it sub-committees or groups that would even visit folks in their homes if they experience some sort of violence. There's always just been this collective need to take care of vulnerable folks in a population or in a community, and yeah, it just blew my mind that when I arrived in Washington, it was like... I remember one person in particular at a conference, this White woman said to me, Where did they get you from?

0:15:04.7 DD: Wow.

0:15:07.4 VE: And I remember having to ask her again, and I was actually in a car at the time, and we were getting to a hotel, it was one of the first conferences I attended in California, and a funder was in the car. And the funder even had a flushed look on her face like, I don't know if that's an appropriate question asked. And this White woman who specifically has a level of notoriety in the Seattle area around prevention asked me that question again, where did they get you from? And in that moment, I realized I was being tokenized.

0:15:43.8 VE: She wanted to know my credentials, she... Because she was struggling to pronounce my name, I was already being othered, so all of those things were already showing up in that moment, and I was still expected to respond in a way where I wasn't offended. And that's the one thing I realized. When anti-Blackness shows up, there's this notion that when something violent is coming your way, you still need to respond to it with a level of decorum, diplomacy, and specifically the ways in which a White woman

would respond, and which is like, Oh, always assume best intentions. That sort of thing where it's like, Wait a minute. If the shoe was on the other foot, could I ask you the same question and wouldn't you kinda look at me a little off for even asking that? Yeah.

0:16:31.9 DD: Right, exactly, yeah. And I remember reading about that piece in the Mother Jones article about you being asked that. And I very much recall from working at the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs that I think coming in, both you and I were very cautious around some of these conversations, just because, and I think most, if not all Black folks are going to be cautious around interrupting microaggressions because that can often have grave consequences for us. But I think another thing that happened is as we got to the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs and began working there, we were the ones that were told, Hey, we want you all to help us become anti-racist, we want to interrupt racism, we want to interrupt White supremacy. And so I say that because I want that to kind of ground this conversation about your experience at this organization and the Mother Jones article, in that we are very much specifically asked to address racism within that organization, within the membership. Funders came to us and said, Hey, we're super glad that you're here, we want to address racism in our work, in our organization, and that's what we attempted to do. That has culminated in this article that came out a little over a week ago now, written by Madison Poly.

0:18:15.6 DD: Let me just pull up the exact title of that article, it is called How the mainstream movement Against Gender-based Violence fails Black workers and survivors. And this piece is very much centered on your experience and experiences at the Washington Coalition of sexual assault program. So we're gonna dive a little bit into this story, like we mentioned, we set up this podcast to talk about anti-Blackness in the movement, and didn't necessarily know what this article was coming out, but I think it offers us a great opportunity to provide additional context and really help people understand everything that's going on there. Where we really wanna start is about the process. I personally, my NDA with the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs was time limited, and so I contacted Mother Jones and provided them with this tip and for them to then do a thorough investigation into the this story, and that was in August of 2021.

0:19:26.9 VE: Wow.

0:19:27.6 DD: And it is now March of 2022. I wanna say that the article maybe came out on the last day, or the day before the last day of February. So she had worked... Madison had worked on this article for I think over six months, and I'm just curious what is that... I know that she was diving into what happened to you, reviewing documents, interviewing people for six months. What was that process like for you?

0:19:53.4 VE: Oh, great question. I wanna say that actually, when Madison had initially reached out to me to interview... To try to interview me. Obviously, there was an NDA in my case, in my case, mine was not time limited, my NDA was actually for the rest of my life, I want people to pay attention to that, for the rest of my life. So there was definitely a concerted effort to make sure that I was silenced. So there was basically a public-facing statement that was around the NDAs for former staff would be essentially no more, and that came as a surprise to me, and I remember sending this obviously to my lawyer, and my lawyer was just as surprised because WCSAP, the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs did not

even have the dignity to contact us directly, and then also community members, just really concerned community members who would reach out and they were like, "Did you know about this NDA thing?" And I just remember just the feeling of just feeling, again, disrespected and just in shock again around the levels in on which WCSAP would continuously go to erase me, these concerted efforts of like, we will do everything, we will say everything, this will come across in this particular way, which is very performative, but we will never directly address Valeriana, they will not come and talk to me at all.

0:21:22.9 VE: And again, that to me just centers this true lived experience that I think a lot of Black folks have is that when you specifically call out anti-Black violence, you are now seen as a dangerous person, and in many respects, it's like you are not only discredited, but there's this notion of like, You can't talk to her. She's angry. She's an angry Black woman. You've gotta be really careful and these are historical nuances, I think that have happened, obviously they go way back to like where I would even say the early periods of colonialism to slavery, the Jim Crow era. To even what we're seeing now, this is how this has always shown up, when I even think of when enslaved Black folks ran from a particular plantation, there was a warning that was put out, there was a message that was sent like, if you find this person, here's what here's a reward as well, but also this person essentially will experience levels of violence if they're caught, and I say this because in many respects, the ways in which WCSAP moved, especially when I was wrongfully terminated, was to put out this public statement and to even create this narrative of, she left, I didn't leave at all. I didn't leave WCSAP.

0:22:51.4 VE: I was very dedicated to this work and specifically around interrupting anti-Blackness and centering Black, brown, indigenous and folks of color who are survivors and victims, and because that obviously came to a head and folks wanted me to behave specifically like a White woman, and I'm not capable of doing that because I'm a dark-skinned Black woman. That's never gonna happen. What ended up happening was, Oh yeah, we'll push her out, we'll specifically terminate her, fire her, and even in this termination letter, this termination letter will say you are discharged from your co-executive director position because you essentially got this co-director executive position with Michelle Dixon-Wall. But the weird thing about that wording in a termination letter is... Why then was Michelle Dixon-Wall allowed to stay on at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs for two years? And why did my letter say discharge as though I'm a fluid... I have never heard that kind of wording, in any professional setting, but that was purposely said, worded and narrated in a specific way, instead of actually saying you're fired from this, so I wasn't really given due course or anything like that.

0:24:13.6 VE: So going back to your original question, the feelings that actually were brought up around Madison contacting me were just similar feelings to when I first was wrongfully terminated and I actually saw a Black therapist, the best thing I've done in my life... One of the best things I've done in my life...

0:24:34.8 DD: Yeah, I'm right there with you. I feel that.

0:24:38.0 VE: Game freaking changer. Let me tell you, if you are a Black person, and you don't have a Black therapist, go get you one. Go get you one.

0:24:46.7 DD: Highly recommend.

0:24:48.9 VE: Really game changer, and we began to unearth together just like the areas of trauma that I've suffered throughout my life, and specifically the journey that I went through at WCSAP, where there was just a lot of anti-Black violence and how it persisted, and so doing that work at the same time as also being interviewed by Madison, really brought up a lot of emotions because it was that feeling again, of being betrayed. I went back to the actual day when WCSAP's board members without a forum showed up in the office, violently showed up unannounced, told us to hand over the laptops, they even wanted our cell phones, and I think about that particular day, I liken it very much to even just my immigrant journey, where I've had instances because I've navigated a variety of different visas in my life or immigration statuses, from being refugee to international student, all the things, and now I'm a Green Card resident of these United States of America, experiencing just the scrutiny that takes place where you're being discredited because someone doesn't think that you belong somewhere, and they did that...

0:25:57.9 VE: I don't wanna say this just because this sounds salacious, but truthfully, what the Washington Coalition of sexual assault programs did to me wasn't just to belittle and discredit me, it was to kill me, it was to kill my spirit, it was to kill my joy, it was to kill my livelihood, and I think of even the mental health implications that I went through, just even through my body, and had I not received the support, had I not been a part of a community or a family that loved me and championed me and that's not everybody's lived experience, I cannot even begin to think of how my mental health to this day could have deteriorated to a point where I may not even be alive [0:26:43.7] ____ for that.

0:26:45.2 DD: I often think about the fact that if you were not so resilient, if you were not so committed to interrupting anti-Blackness, committed to this movement, these folks would be accountable for a lot more harm than they even are, and there's a lot of harm here, there's a lot of harm that I think the that Mother Jones article is the start of naming some of these things that happened, but we need to ensure that accountability happens in this movement and build on this story, so while this Mother Jones article is detailed, it could have been an entire book, there were many, many things that both you and I experienced that other staff and other folks experienced that were part of this story, and I think Madison Poly did a great job and in summarizing the situation and communicating what she could in that space, but I'm curious, what are some aspects of this experience that you want people to know about or understand that the article did not capture?

0:28:00.3 VE: That is a good question. There's probably a lot truthfully, but if I was to get into it, we'd probably have to have like a five podcast series during...

0:28:07.7 DD: It could be a book, we could be here all day.

0:28:09.4 VE: It really could be, or a documentary or a movie. But I mean, what I would say is, some of the main things themes that point out to me is the physical assault that I experienced, the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, a former staffer at WCSAP, physically pushed me.

0:28:30.4 DD: I think that this happened right before the weekend, and we came back the next Monday, and that staff member was still there, was

working, and they actually gave us an account of the situation that was not true, that didn't include that physical violence. And so I think that even adds to the situation that not only did this happen, not only did people who were standing right there, who were in authority, witness it happening, but also this person did not face consequences, did not receive any sort of discipline from the organization and when you look at your experience where as the article suggests grievances were fabricated against you and those were taken very seriously... We can very much start to see a pattern and a difference in how you're treated compared to other folks.

0:29:30.7 VE: Yeah, and I think what's deeply troubling is a lot of folks don't... I mean there was a lot of other things that took place that Madison obviously highlighted, but one thing I just wanna highlight again is Black people have been killed, Murdered, erased for lesser things. I often think of the fact that if I lived in New York and this was taking place, who knows, someone could have had access to calling the cops and I could have been taken to Rikers Island. There are just instances upon instances where Black folks have been harmed in such a way where we've not even had the opportunity to give an account for the accusations and the harm being hurled against us, and so for me to even have this opportunity to speak truth to power, my hope is that folks who have had this narrative or notion that, well, this was justifiable or this was on this basis, you'll think really deeply about the fact that could this have happened to a White woman?

0:30:23.0 DD: Right. Well, I think you can even look at... You know, again, the fact that Michelle Dixon-Wall, whose named quite a bit in the article, her last day is today, so even after this article came out, after it's become clear that she fabricated the allegations against you and all these other issues that are clear in the article that departure is a lot less sudden than yours, a lot less sudden than the way they treated you. Do I wanna come back to the Moment of Truth letter, but before I do, I wanna ask you, I know for me personally, when this happened, when the WCSAP office shut down and people began to see that this was clearly a response to you and myself trying to hold the organization accountable for racism and anti-Blackness. I had some folks who came to me and said, Hey, I wanna support you, what they're doing is wrong, and a number of those folks still support me today, and I support them and we're still in community, and I'm very grateful for them, but I also had one or two folks who came to me and said, Hey, I wanna support you.

0:31:38.6 DD: What they're doing is wrong. I don't wanna be affiliated with them, I'm not gonna work with them anymore. But then just a year later, some short time later, they're then taking contracts with WCSAP not reaching out and saying, Hey, this is what I'm doing, no accountability at all, but instead just distancing themselves from us and taking on these lucrative contracts... I do wanna just mention that I think one thing that a lot of people might not understand around accountability is when these... When harm happens.

0:32:20.4 DD: For somebody to contract with an organization to do trainings with an organization while that harm hasn't been addressed while Black folks are still silenced by NDAs while, the perpetrators of that harm are still employed, very much legitimizes that institution and that organization, and that organization can then look and say, Hey, look at... Let's forget about these Black folks we harmed, and let's instead focus on this important work that we're doing, so I just wanna name that dynamic because there is a very real harm that comes from people engaging with organizations or individuals that do harm. And again, we can make parallels to the type of harm that we

address in this movement, where if we have a perpetrator of sexual violence, if you associate with them, you're giving them a level of credibility, and if you're not holding them accountable for the harm that they did then you're complicit in the harm that that person is continuing to do, and so I just wanna mention that piece because I don't know if folks don't understand it or what's going on there, but I just think it's really critical for people to understand that giving credibility to an institution that's giving harm is complicity with that harm.

0:33:45.9 VE: I think so too, and I think that the concerning piece about it, is it just speaks to how Black folks are dehumanized, so we're not seeing fully as human beings, it wasn't long ago in this country when we were considered three-fifths of a human being or a person, and I see how that's also carried on inter-generationally, where there are actually folks that know that, Hey, I wouldn't treat or behave in this way with anyone else, but specifically when a Black person shows up, it's time to scrutinize... It's time to ask questions like, I'm just curious. And that curiosity never exists when it's another White person who is actually perpetrating the harm, and I think it's just also important to note that the fact that here we are on what the 11th of March 2022. And to this day, the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs has not issued a public apology or an acknowledgement for the anti-Black violence that I experienced and you experienced is baffling, and I often think of the fact that 90 plus percent of WCSAP's funding is publicly funded how will they give an account to specifically to Black survivors of violence and...

0:34:58.1 VE: Victims of survivors of violence. How does that sit with WCSAP? Because I definitely wrote an email to the current board to name all of these things, and I have not received a response at all, and I think it's really troubling for any sister coalitions or coalitions that do work with WCSAP, who are not holding WCSAP accountable because I honestly believe that the integrity of WCSAP is not just on the line, the integrity no longer exists, and because it no longer exists, I think we all have a collective duty to hold WCSAP accountable. I think there's a collective duty for folks to even reach out to WSCADV and say, "Hey, executive director, here are these things that are being named, how are you rectifying harm, how are you all approaching this and centering survivors? Are you approaching this from a lens that is trauma-informed or are you just perpetrating more harm, covering stuff up, writing these statements that sound so sexy in the field that here you are rectifying harm because you've hired Black consultants that you're paying who you actually, when you"...

0:36:06.9 DD: Both you and I we do racial equity consultation, training facilitation and work around anti-Blackness, and here we were being pushed out of an organization that said it, it was committed to these things, and then they go on to hire White women who then are paid by the organization to hire Black women as consultants, to train them and do workshops to teach them about anti-racism so that they can hopefully in the future, implement that in the organization, I mean that really seems like a not a very efficient way for us to be spending public funds. I do want to... In terms of talking about WCSAP's response to this, I do want to name what their statement was, so this is quoted from the article, it says In a statement WCSAP's current Board of Directors apologize to "Those people who feel disrespected" by the organization. "WCSAP has undergone many changes over the past three years, including a complete turnover of the board," they wrote, "While none of us served on the board at the time of these events, we take all claim seriously

and are working to address past and present arms to ensure a stable anti-racist future for WCSAP."

0:37:32.2 DD: So I just wanna provide that context so people can kind of see what the response has been from the organization, I will also name that there are current board members of the organization who were involved with signing NDAs and join the organization in the Spring of 2020, when the organization was working to ensure that we couldn't tell our stories, so I wanna provide that context to folks who are listening to this, but I also wanna move on to ask you a question about the Moment of Truth letter.

0:38:12.1 DD: So in June 2020, 47 state and territorial coalitions signed on to the Moment of Truth letter that essentially named dynamics of anti-Blackness and racism in this movement, and the ways in which Black survivors BIPOC survivors and advocates have been dismissed, and instead, the movement has gone in a direction of incarceration, working with... Working alongside law enforcement, working alongside corrections, and not to say that we should have absolutely no connection with these institutions, but instead these connections are incredibly, incredibly strong in the movement, in a lot of movement organizations now, and so this happened shortly after George Floyd was murdered. This letter came out and it very much said that we want to interrupt anti-Blackness, we want to change, etcetera, I encourage people to look up Moment of Truth letter and read it themselves if they haven't seen it. And at the time, June 2020, I believe that both of us were in contact with WCSAP trying to settle our discrimination claims, and they were working to silence us with these NDAs, and they signed on to this letter.

0:39:40.8 VE: Right.

0:39:41.1 DD: I'm just curious, what impact that had on you, to see this organization sign onto this commitment while they were at the same time engaging in anti-Black violence, attempting to silence you...

0:39:57.3 VE: I gotta ask, historically, any space, any organization, corporation, institution, coalition or community group that has a foundation of anti-Black violence, how do you expect to make a profound mark historically? Because one day history will come back to this moment and people will be tasked and asked, Why were you involved in this? How come you moved in this way? The fact that this story is now out in this way, and I can say to this day I've just been overwhelmed with tears of joy, I think that that's the best way I can describe it with folks who've reached out and have said, I am so sorry you went through this, I believe you, I believe you, I just wanna stand with you, I can't believe you went through this and you were still showing up in these other ways, organizing and helping other folks. I just think of my Blackness, and how my Blackness is a representation of what my ancestors have had to navigate in this entire world, and how they've existed, and through so many errors in this world that have been so violently anti-Black, they still existed and persisted.

0:41:12.2 VE: I wonder if that's the resilience that I am living and breathing, because, honestly, Darin, I've only read the article once, and that's on purpose for my own mental health. And when I think of that Moment of Truth letter that was shared out, and specifically even by WSCADV and WCSAP, I don't understand how they don't even carry levels of shame, because I would. If I had been involved in this much, or these levels of anti-Black violence, I wouldn't be going on a performative tour. I know that we definitely live in a capitalist structure and, yes, anti-Black violence is

alive and well, but isn't the whole point why we get into this movement and do this work is so that we can make a difference? Isn't it so that we can actually interrupt forms of gender-based violence, sexual violence, domestic violence, or just violence, period? Because the racial violence here is so raw and real, and I constantly think of the fact that the Me Too movement specifically showed the outward-facing things, meaning perpetrators are obviously one part of the movement to end violence, they were being named, and everybody was like, I can't believe this person did this, I can't believe this person did this.

0:42:17.4 VE: But here we are in 2022, and wasn't it just the other day that even RAINN, the organization RAINN, has fingers being pointed at them for the anti-Black violence, the homophobia, the financial oppression that's taking place there. I actually truly believe that a reckoning is here, and people need to wake up. And what this reckoning is actually saying is, If you are leading a movement or a space and you are privately causing harm and publicly touting something else, history will also reckon with you. And I say this loudly because I think of folks who came before me, my time, and stood and told their truth and they were systemically erased. But their voices still echo through time, and history is still calling those names forth. And I truly believe that ancestors before my time are also seeing this...

0:43:15.4 VE: Are also witnessing this. I think specifically of the fact that there was a concerted effort here to create this narrative that we are this kind of institution, or organization, but truly this is not who we are, we really don't care about Black folks. I think deeply about the fact that here we are and living in a state that's considered "progressive", but yet it's just repackaged, the White supremacy is packaged in a different way, and manufactured in a way where you have to... You literally have to play in your mind mental gymnastics to name, to find, like, Did this really happen to me? Was this how this was said? I sit here and I think to myself, when will these spaces, whether it be WSCADV, whether it be KCSARC, whether it be WCSAP, or even member programs... It has been a part of the past at WCSAP. I think of all of these spaces, when will you give an account for yourself? When will you stand in the truth, stand in the sun? Because at the end of the day, you may think you're getting away with something or you may justify your actions, but the ways in which this civil rights chapter is reckoning with everyone, no stone will be left unturned. I'mma just say that.

0:44:36.4 DD: Thank you so much for that comprehensive answer to that question. I think folks will get a lot from what you just said. And hopefully folks who sign on to that Moment of Truth letter are listening, because I think there's certainly a role when you sign on to something with other organizations, other people, where there is a role where you need to hold them accountable. Their behavior is going to reflect on you because you've done this together, you've signed on to this thing together. And so now this, unfortunately, in many ways taints that Moment of Truth letter that I think, ultimately if done genuinely, is a great achievement and a great step for this movement. But when we have organizations or individuals signing on in performance, that tanks the entire thing. And so what I hope that organizations that sign on to that can ask themselves, what can they do to address the way that this letter has been tainted by those who have signed on in performative ways, and did not... Were not committed to interrupting anti-Blackness?

0:45:53.3 DD: I do want to provide the title and the author of the RAINN article that you mentioned, so that folks can take a look at that if they're

interested. There's a lot of commonalities here, and a lot of commonalities in stories that have not been told.

0:46:11.8 VE: Right.

0:46:13.8 DD: And so I think one of the hopes of this Mother Jones article is that people who have had similar experiences of anti-Blackness in this movement but have not felt comfortable or been able or felt safe to talk about those experiences, might feel safer, might feel more encouraged to name that. But anyways, the article is called, "Insiders say RAINN..." That's spelled R-A-I-N-N, "the nation's foremost organization for victims of sexual assault, is in crisis over allegations of racism and sexism." And that's by Bradford William Davis. I definitely encourage folks to take a look at that. Valeriana, what are you up to now? And where can people find you, where can people access your brilliance?

0:47:11.8 VE: Thank you, Darin. So I still have my racial equity consultancy, which is very much alive and well, and I'm pretty busy. But if folks want to reach out and find out ways in which I can either be a public speaker or do some workshops or some deep diving on interrupting anti-Blackness in your organization or institution, you can check out Necessary Interruptions LLC dot com, or you can email me at valeriana@necessaryinterruptions.com. And, currently, I serve at the Social Justice Fund Northwest as the Interim Executive Director. I work with a bunch of radical, radical co-conspirators. I love my job, I love the work that I do. It's such an opportunity to serve and to examine how we can mobilize resources, monies in particular, and move it to grassroot-led spaces, groups, organizations, and it's such a good way to also, again, interrupt White supremacy. And I just really wanna give my folks at SJF a shout-out, because even as this article came out, I shared it with staff, board members and folks who just rallied around me, and just been concerned about my mental health and wanting to see me fully heal.

0:48:32.8 VE: And I honestly feel so blessed that where I am in my life and what I get to do is very much in line with, again, interrupting violence, but more specifically also looking for ways in which the philanthropic movement can continue to take this work to like a 3.0 level, that really centers a stronger Black liberation-led lens, and we do that a lot at SJF, we're really exploring those nuances. So feel free to send me an email if specifically something I said resonated with you. And my hope, 'cause the day is coming when I will be able to really give a full account of all the things, so I am in the works of writing, I'll just put that out there. Thank you so much for having me, Darin. I hope to come back at some point and we can talk about how this journey is still very much unfolding. I appreciate you. And for all the listeners out there, especially those who have had to navigate any forms of oppression and specifically anti-Black violence, I want you to know that you are not alone.

0:49:34.9 VE: Please do not play the mental gymnastics in your mind, and having to second guess, Did this happen? It did happen. I want you to know that I not only feel those sentiments, but I believe you. And my hope is that you can connect, reach out to myself and Darin, because we are mobilizing and we're building some really great and rad things, and the future is still bright despite the ways in which White supremacy tries to show itself. Because Black liberation efforts are here to stay.

0:50:04.6 DD: Absolutely. I think folks are really gonna get a lot out of this conversation, and I think we're gonna be a stronger movement because of it, so thank you, Valeriana.

0:50:14.8 VE: Thank you, thank you for having me.

0:50:16.7 DD: Alright. Well, that does it for today's podcast. Thank you for joining us for this conversation on anti-Blackness in 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, in 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 out the rest of the podcasts in this series. This series of podcasts on anti-Blackness in 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 these podcasts.

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