

#105 From Privilege to Progress with Michelle Saahene

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SPEAKERS

Michelle Glogovac, Michelle Saahene

M Michelle Glogovac 00:01
You're listening to the mind simplified life podcast and this is episode number 105.

M Michelle Glogovac 00:12
Welcome to the mind simplified life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present. don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life and start taking action today. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac, and I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you will taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life.

M Michelle Glogovac 00:46
Hello, my friends welcome to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. As you've seen and heard, this past year has been one in which I'm finding my voice more and more. I'm also getting comfortable with having conversations that don't always happen, as well as working hard to listening to the stories of others. In my quest to learn more from others, I reached out to Michelle Sikkim, who is a coach, activists, speaker and advocate, and the co founder of from privilege to progress. Many of you might not be aware of who Michelle is, but you might be very familiar with how a video of her went viral in 2018 when she called out a Starbucks barista for calling the cops to arrest two black men for not buying a coffee. This event sparked a movement as well as changes in Starbucks policy on not needing to purchase a coffee to use the restroom. In 2020, we heard many people speak out on Black Lives mattering on a daily basis. But suddenly, things are mighty quiet. Michelle and I feel we need to keep talking and having these conversations, not only when the media is highlighting events, but all the time. She's sharing her story of what happened on that day in 2018. Along with how we can have educational conversations with others that aren't demeaning button lightning. Hi, Michelle. Why Michelle? It's the best name in the world. I think that was how my email started to YouTube was first of all, you have the best name and it's spelled properly so I appreciate you take a moment to introduce yourself please besides being called Michelle,



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Michelle Saahene 02:35

my name is Michelle Santa I am co founder of from privilege to progress. I just moved down here to Dallas Texas. So I am just trying to get acclimated here and I do some coaching some life coaching. I'm a speaker I'm an activist, and I'm just really excited to get into this conversation with you today Michelle,

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Michelle Glogovac 02:57

I am stoked to talk to you I did not know that that you moved to Texas I knew that you moved into an apartment who what would make you want to move to Texas during this time

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Michelle Saahene 03:06

love you know whatever. I'd actually tried to move here a couple years ago and mentally and emotionally I didn't do well and I only lasted about four months because it was the first time ever in my life that I was called the N word to my face. And I was like you know what, I knew it I knew moving to the south wasn't good for me I knew going to a like a big ol red state probably wasn't the best idea but I do think that maybe part of that was going into it already worrying about that and subconsciously I could have been kind of attracting maybe a little bit more of that of that energy but the fact of the matter is it still happened it was still traumatic It's never happened to me before you know so at least not directly to my face. And so I just tried to have a different outlook and try to shape my mindset when I came back down here to say you know, you know what, I'm just going to, I'm going to attract good people I'm going to attract positivity I'm not going to encounter those people this time I go down to my boyfriend are still together. So I'm back here to give it another shot.

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Michelle Glogovac 04:05

And you know, Texas it's different than what it was before. I love the state of Texas. I was living in Los Angeles and I was offered a job in which they said you can either move to Houston or Miami and I was like oh no, Texans are the best like they're the friendliest, nicest people I'm moving to Texas and I thought they were great until I then got the opportunity to move to Chicago and they are the greatest people

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Michelle Saahene 04:31

yeah that's awesome well you need to go to shoot I've only been to Chicago once for work but the ones who are you definitely have to go I don't do this number eight

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Michelle Glogovac 04:38

well but but there are some still there's still some good Texans in Texas.

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Michelle Saahene 04:43

Yeah. Really, really awesome people the last two weeks I've been here so it's working whatever, whatever subconscious manifestations and affirmations I've been doing in the morning and at night seems to be working because I keep meeting really cool people so

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Michelle Glogovac 04:56

good and remind me when we're done. I'll give you some names of people who we're still in the area. We'll get you hooked up with some good people. Awesome. So you mentioned that you're the co-founder from privilege to progress. How did that come about? And can you share the story of what happened in 2018? Because I think a lot of people are familiar with it, but may have forgotten it. And we need to talk more about what's going on what happened a year ago, and why we're not talking about it still as much today.

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Michelle Saahene 05:25

So I will fill you in for anyone who didn't hear about the story. Or anyone who forgot the story. What happened in 2018, which is another thing about Texas that I found interesting. When I came down here, a lot of people hadn't heard about that story. And my own boyfriend never heard about what happened. And he's black down here. So that was, I found out. Yeah, very interesting. People around the world heard about it. But like I kept running into Texas, I had no idea what I was talking about. So 2018, I go to a Starbucks in Philadelphia, and it was a Starbucks that I would purposely avoid. Because I went there one time early on, I think 2013 when I had first moved there, and I walked in there, and pretty much everybody was white, I was the only black woman I thought it was very strange and not representative of the Philadelphia that that I knew I moved there for the diversity. Philadelphia is a very diverse city, it's actually I believe, only 30.3% some percent white of the state overall. So it's a very, very diverse city. But this particular location was not diverse at all. It is in a part of the city that is actually 72% white. So that specific part of the city, Rittenhouse Square, Center City, Philadelphia is gentrified, just, you know, quite quite frankly, they have structured that part of the city to be mostly white. And that is what the businesses around there reflect. So I decided to go back there this day, April 12 2018. Because I was I don't know I was feeling positive. It was a seasonably warm April day, I was feeling good. feeling positive. And I was like you know what, let me just go check it out. Again. Maybe it's maybe the scene has different has changed since I was since I've been in in Philadelphia. And mind you the first time I went there, and I walked in and I was the only black person I thought it was strange. I walked right back out. And I walked to a different Starbucks deeper into the city on 19th and chestnut. Because that one was more diverse, more representative of the Philadelphia that I had grown to know and to love. So I'm like, you know, let me go back there. let's let's let's check it out. Let's check out the scene. And I walked back in there, same scene. I was the only black woman, one other black man for the people of color. And you got to be kidding me. It's been five years. How is this Starbucks the same. So I was like, You know what, let me just buy my coffee, sit down and continue working. So I went I got my coffee, I sat down at my white Mocha Latte with almond milk at one and a half pumps. And I sat down and I started working. And about 45 minutes later, two young men walk in and the two young black eyes and I was excited. They were cute. They had nice sneakers on they had swag. I like their demeanor, their clothes, I just the one guy was wearing a purple shirt was so cool. And I just liked I just liked looking at them. But also, I felt more comfortable because I was I didn't feel like I was standing out as much with me and the one other black man and this and that Starbucks. So they walk in and I'm watching them and they come to the barista. And they asked her if they can use a bathroom and she says no, it's for paying customers only. And I said okay, and they sat down. That was it. That was it, nothing else happened. And as they remember them leaving my peripheral and they sat down and I I couldn't take my eyes off of the barista. Because for some reason, you know, as she's walking away, I saw her mouth saying something to herself. And I immediately said, I think she just said something racist. But I also recognize that I was having, I was making a snap judgment, I was having a moment of judging someone based on the color of her skin. I didn't like the way that this white woman had to react had interacted with these two young black men, and I jumped to conclusions. And it's really important that we learn how to recognize when we are making those snap judgments, and can check ourselves. So I had a dialog with myself. I said, you know, Michelle, you are doing exactly the same thing to somebody that you don't want done to you. You have no idea what she just said, Maybe she forgot some simple syrup in the bath. Maybe she forgot some coffee beans or some hot chocolate. You need to put your head back down and keep working. And so that's what I did. I remember very clearly trying to talk myself

out of scolding myself and talking myself out of the thought that I just had. So about five minutes later, the cops showed up. I thought that was very strange because nothing had happened. It was very, very quiet day nothing had been going on. And so I'm just a naturally nosy person. And so I was trying to stop. Like, what's the drama? You know, like maybe they're following up on something that happened earlier in the day, maybe even the day before. I just want to know, what's, what the beef is. what's what's the drunk? Yeah.

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Michelle Glogovac 10:23

Are they there for a coffee or something? Going down? Yeah, what's what's

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Michelle Saahene 10:27

going down because they walk in the barista immediately walks up to them, they walk up to the counter, it looked like you know, there could have been something happening. So I lean in. And I heard the barista lie. And I heard her say, those two guys in the corner are refusing to leave. And my heart just dropped to my stomach. So I was like, I did not want to see what I think that I could potentially see today. And it was very easy to tell which two men she was talking about because they were the only two men in the corner who looked any different than anyone around them. And what was even more telling of what was about to happen was that there was no follow up questions from the police officers. There was no okay, well, well, what did you say? What did they say? What did you do? What did they do? None of that took place. They just said Oh, those two okay. And they one sided? That's it. That was it. And I was are you kidding me? To turn to 410 to six to eight, eight police officers showed up to arrest two guys for not buying a coffee. Now mind you, I was sitting there and as I'm watching this happen, I looked at the white man sitting next to me who got there about 30 seconds after I did we ended up sitting next to each other because it was it was pretty full that day. And he didn't have a coffee the entire time. I remember a white girl mid job coming in to use the bathroom. I remember her wearing all dark colors, but just pink headphones and I remember specifically wondering to myself, if she works there that she had the code to get into the bathroom because in Philadelphia you need a code to get into the bathroom, and only the barista can give it to you someone that works there. I wonder if she was a patron there so often that they built like a relationship with her and as a courtesy that just gave her the cokes but I remember thinking to myself Oh, that's strange. How does she just get in get in here and use the bathroom and leave because as a person of color, you try to do things to mitigate some of the potential stereotyping I don't want to be seen as some kind of freeloader so I'll go I'll go buy something before I even asked to use the bathroom and won't even get to that point because I just don't want anyone to say anything to me already. So when I see other people exercising that that that privilege not even thinking about it. I sometimes I just find it, you know, just interesting. So I'm remembering you know all this as I'm watching these two guys get arrested. I'm looking around, I see half the people don't have copies. And no one's saying anything. You gotta be freaking kidding me. So I stand up. I'm shaking. I'm sweating. I remember at one point actually, I was shaking so bad that I looked down at my hands to see if I can actually see myself shaking and I could I was trembling that that much because it wasn't a matter of am I going to do something it's what am I going to do? I just knew I was gonna inflict that that anxiety. Have you ever had a panic attack and like you feel like something's impending doom lessons gonna happen. And you might like, get up and run around the room. I felt that that feeling. And the next thing I know, I'm out of my chair. I'm yelling at everybody. I'm like, dude, they're being arrested for not buying a coffee, do you not see. And so I walked up to the police officer, which was incredibly risky on my part. I tapped him on the shoulder and I was like, why are you doing this? And he goes, go ask the barista, which I thought was a very interesting response. As you know, there's no head is well, no accountability and responsibility on them to assess the situation properly as if she was their boss. And I was noticeably angry, which is the opposite of de escalation.

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Michelle Glogovac 14:01

You would have thought he would have said Ma'am, Stay out of this sit down

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Michelle Saahene 14:04

right? Now he was like go, I said Risa. I was like, Well, okay, that. So I woke up to the brisa. And I got Why did you call the cops. And she goes, I really can't say, like, trying to play it off to me, like something happened that, you know, that I just wasn't privy to, like there was information that they knew that that was going on that you know, I just didn't know what I was talking about. But at the same time that she said that her neck, her face, and her chest got bright red. So that indicated one of two things to me, either she knew what she had done. And she was embarrassed that she got caught, or she didn't know what she had done. And she just realized it. And she was embarrassed by that. Either way, that flushing of the retinas made me realize that she knew that there was something wrong with with the situation deep down. Now, side note, we found out later the CEO of Starbucks has Howard Schultz actually admitted flat out to my partner, Melissa that he had a talk with the bracelet. And she admitted to him that if they were to what guys she would not have called cops. So anyways,

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Michelle Glogovac 15:12

that's unreal and for him to go on and say that and I know that later on, they changed their rules or whatever you want to call it, I just used air quotes and no one can see me that you can go in and you don't have to buy a coffee anymore. I mean, I've gone in will be on a road trip, pull over, I'm like, go use a Starbucks bathroom because it's clean. And we're in and out because I'm not going to buy a latte, you know, in the middle of the afternoon and be all hyped up. Right? We just got to use the bathroom so they get enough of my business, that that's okay, I think. But that's exactly what you're talking about. And these guys didn't even use the bathroom. They just sat there.

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Michelle Saahene 15:48

Yep. Yep. So it was it was it was crazy. I don't know if she comes up, you know, if she had a revelation, and she admitted that to Howard Schultz or she was just like, not wanting to call cops that they were white. Like I don't I don't know, you know what, what came first. But so when I asked her that, and you know, and she, you know, she got read. I said to her, I asked her, did you feel like your life was in any danger? She ignored me. And she like walked down the counter to the register. So I followed her. I asked her again. Did you feel like your life was in any danger? Do you feel like you were threatened? And she ignored me again. So I took a step back, I'll be admitted I yelled at her told us she was an effing coward. And I packed up all my stuff. And I'm looking around and everyone's staring at me and like, it's just it's silent at that point. And I remember one woman looked at I was looking at her lips started quivering. I was like, Oh, God, if she cries, I'm gonna cry. Please don't cry, please don't cry, because I just don't want to cry right now. And I look over to my, to my right, and there's a white girl staring at me. And it was very strange because she was staring at me, but packing up her stuff. But like, wouldn't take her eyes off me as she's packing a purse, like I'm packing up my stuff. And she's packing her stuff. Like she was following my lead. And just like watching my move, and like when I would do something like she would do something, you know, and, but the only other person to actually verbally addressed to Starbucks that day was Melissa, I didn't know her. I never met her before and never seen it before in Philadelphia, maybe I had on the street, and I never knew it. But she stood up and she said, You know, I go to Starbucks all the time. I was just here the other day with my son for four hours. I don't buy anything. No one ever asked me to leave. And you know, why was a white woman. So we walk out. And I remember there was some females that were out there a group of girls walked up to me, a group of young young women and they go, if that would have happened to us, we would have flipped out. And I said, and you would have been able to because your way. And I remember wondering if I was like, Oh, I wonder if that was a little bit too harsh for them to hear. Because I was. I said it's so just matter of factly and bluntly, and they looked at one another. They look back at me and they said, You're right. In that moment, anyone who would have been there, it would have been impossible for

them to not understand what had happened yet, had we not? Had I not stood up and told everyone what was actually going on. People would have continued on about their day and assume the worst and that those men probably deserved whatever they had coming to them, right fully. So they were handcuffed behind their backs, put into a squad car and taken to jail for 12 hours for not buying coffee. I remember one one gentleman actually walked the one of the black man that was there. He actually walked back inside, bought two coffees came back out and said, this is about the coffee can you let them go? And of course it wasn't about the coffee. They did not let them go. They they did take them to jail. And I remember them asking, you know, the, you know, Dante and rashami. Like, what did we do? Just Can you tell us what we did? They were there for a business meeting. The men that they were meeting there, his name was Andrew. He was he's a white man, he actually showed up. And he he was you know, he was probably gonna buy him a coffee. Probably. Right. And he was saying the same thing as me. He was like, What did they do? is it's not obvious discrimination. Like Can you can you not see this. And it was just they were just being so dramatic. They were moving chairs aside, dragging chairs across the floor, unnecessarily causing a commotion as I'm sorry, anyone who's watching but I just do not love police. I don't trust them fully that I watched too many crime shows, with all these, you know, corruption and seeing that with my eyes with a firm, you know, really seeing that and also by self experiencing, please, excessive force at a younger age. It just as if you're a person of color, you don't have the privilege to just blindly trust. And then in that situation, they really didn't use any discernment. Like they couldn't have spoken to the barista and been like, well, they didn't do anything, ma'am. what's what's actually like? You're wasting our tax dollars. They're resting Yeah, buying coffee when they're people around sitting here not buying coffee. So I remember at one point, Melissa To me, she was like, this needs to go on social media. And I said, I didn't have Facebook at the time. I didn't have Twitter, barely use Instagram. I don't even have cable. I didn't have cable for five years. So I was like, I just wasn't really plugged into, I don't know, news and like, certain certain things

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Michelle Glogovac 20:15

living a very mentally healthy life. Yeah.

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Michelle Saahene 20:19

Just. And I remember when we created our group, we had to, we wanted to do a one for Facebook. And I was like, do I need to have a Facebook account to create a new page, and she was like, and I was like, I do not want to get back on this platform. So after the whole year, like I finally got back on it, but I remember she was like, Okay, I'm gonna put it on Twitter. Like, is this caption? Okay, how's it gay? It's fine. I lied. I don't even look at the caption. I never even looked at her phone. I was like, I don't know. Just do whatever you want. In my head. I said that, but I'm gonna No, it's fine. I did not even look at it. And then I remember a couple days later, some friends texted me and call me because I called everyone I knew that day to just bend. And they were like, do you know that this thing that you told us about has just went viral? And I was like, Oh, no, I mean, I don't cable? No, I don't know.

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Michelle Glogovac 21:08

They were viral. Not just the the whole incident. But you.

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Michelle Saahene 21:12

And they were like, I actually had a go from from from high school. Reach out to me. She goes, Shelley, Is this you? People call Michelle in high school Shelly, Is this you? Because you couldn't see my face? But you heard my voice? And I'm like, how do you remember my voice? I haven't spoken a decade at least. So that was interesting. But people were people recognize my voice over reaching out to me, and they're like, is this is this you? And they can see my

hands? So I'm like, Yes, they were like, well, who is this most of the peano? And why? It's like everyone, why is everyone interviewing her? and Why aren't you saying anything? This was you, Michelle. And I said, Well, at least at the time, I didn't have the language. But I intuitively knew what was happening, which was they were censoring the white voice. And I'm like, you know what, it's not even about me. I'm not the one that got arrested. So I hope that these guys get their justice. And you know, this white woman doesn't take up too much airtime. And you know, that's it. But fortunately, she actually tracked me down. And I got another random text message from someone saying, Hey, listen to penis trying to find you. So her and I met up a couple days later. And she looked at me she was Catholic world class best friends. And we just started having conversations about what the world was talking about. People did not understand what racism looked like today. They didn't believe that those things could happen unprovoked. And they especially didn't.

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Michelle Glogovac 22:36

We can edit it out.

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Michelle Saahene 22:39

I'm on my I'm on my Mac, I'm. So we were just realizing that people really didn't understand what their privilege was. They were just waking up to that. They were like, hmm, that can really happen. I'm provoked. Yes, and it happens actually, every single day. It just doesn't happen to you. And so people really wanted to understand their privilege. They wanted to do something about it. They wanted to help, but they didn't know where to start. And so that's really how privilege to progress got started. And Melissa and I decided that you know what, let's curate a group. Let's create a community of people who want to learn and want to use their privilege and want to, you know, undo their conditioning, and learn all the things that they didn't learn in school and just get on this path of anti racism and create communities where we can all be safe. That's really that's really just the beginning of our story.

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Michelle Glogovac 23:30

That's amazing. And it's huge. You have over half a million Instagram followers. Yeah. You know, you don't think that Oh, today, you know, I'm just going to go to Starbucks. And in a few years from now, I'm going to have half a million followers and be known as the woman who called up the barista, you know, and really, I wouldn't whatever had you know, happened to the

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Michelle Saahene 23:50

barista. She was fired. And I found out later that she actually was apparently from middle of nowhere, Ohio and again, companies really need to understand cultural competency. I grew up in middle of nowhere, Pennsylvania. I know the type of mentality that people there have. I grew up with a lot of internalized racism. Because of that cultural conditioning. I remember recently I found a picture of myself in high school with a friend of mine next to me. Michelle, there was a confederate flag behind me on the wall, like like, above us and I realized I mean, when people say like, Oh, I love high school my high school was trashed for me I had to I like I had to like emotionally mentally I was just so drained from constantly experiencing racism you know those symbols I don't even I don't even remember that. I don't know how many racist symbols are probably were around me that I had to somehow just put my blinders on. I found this picture and I was I was blown away that like, I mean, I don't I don't know what I was thinking back then. I think I have First selected memory on purpose from that time of my life. But yeah, I and we live in in

Pennsylvania, we were not in the south, but that flag was there. And so you can't just take some someone from that type of environment and pop them in one of the most diverse one of the blackest cities in America and not think that something might happen. Yeah.

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Michelle Glogovac 25:22

And I think that now with, with the emergence more of social media of the news of people paying attention of us talking more about it, it's awakening more some in a good way, in some in a bad way. And we're seeing the extremes on both sides. Mm hmm. Yeah, I saw a tick tock video just this morning that was so disturbing that people were tagging the FBI and Secret Service and saying someone needs to go knock on this guy's door. Because he's out of his ever loving mind with threats. And, you know, it's just scary that these people have these voices that are so loud. And yet we need to speak even louder. And, you know, you and I were talking last week about how, you know, last year with George Floyd everyone was coming out and Black Lives Matter, and we're talking about it and it was everywhere. And now it's kind of died down again. And it shouldn't and that's why we're talking because I don't want it to die down. I want this conversation to keep going. And I know you do too. You know, why is it that people I think that maybe it's dying down because people are tired? Yeah, cuz I'm sure that you I have plenty of black friends where like, We're exhausted, like, this is exhausting. And, you know, even as a white person to talk about it, I told you last week about the TEDx panel. And you know, getting off of this 30 minutes, I was like, holy shit, this was so exhausting to have to try to teach people how to treat others equally. Or are you stupid? And to do that every single day? Yeah, it's exhausting. But you know what, these are people's lives we're talking about? Yeah. So get get tired.

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Michelle Saahene 27:05

get tired. We're tired, too. Yeah. Very, very, very tired. And, you know, people, it's, it's not even that. I think Tired. Tired is one that that mental fatigue, but unfortunately, it's also the, you know, the privilege of being able to go back to your lives, like, Oh, you know, and, you know, people also thought that because Joe Biden, you know, won the presidency, that meant something. I mean, there's right now I'm in Texas, and they're Haitians being whipped at the border, trying trying to come into America, physically being whipped, but then you look at the Canadian border, and that's where most of the people who come in and overstay their visas are actually coming through Canada Border but that border is not militarized because it's not black and brown people so you know, people just assume that you know the change of administration's while I do think was an improvement because the last administration was wild.

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Michelle Glogovac 28:00

That's a nice word.

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Michelle Saahene 28:03

It's a very nice word. You know, I cuss a lot so I'm trying to be you know, respectful in your pocket. But you know, it's you know, but But still, these things are still happening because it's systemic. This has been baked into the country from the beginning the beginning of this country was formed was based upon we need to wipe the indigenous people off the land to make room they had to wipe them off and then we had to build the country but we don't want to build it ourselves. So we need to find people to build it for us. I mean, it's just anyone listening to this after you listen to this podcast, please go to see on radio seeing white it's a series from the center of Duke studies something like that. And it's a black historian and white and white historian they're academics they're they're incredibly brilliant man. And they go into detail from the beginning of how race was even created because it's not real It is made up like you and I are probably more closely related than you and another white person because I'm I'm African you know,

and like everybody who's come out of Africa so um, they they go into the history of how Greece was created started in in Europe, I think by the Portuguese, but how America specifically took that lie and hardened those racial lines just for power and control it's not real race is not real but racism is very real. And I think the other issue with with people kind of getting quiet again is because I don't think people realize how manipulated and influenced they are by what is being shown on the on the on the news, it's like they pay attention to what they're being told to pay attention to. And I realized the severity of that after I watched the social dilemma, documentary on Netflix,

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Michelle Glogovac 29:51

yeah, that was like a turn. Okay, just turn everything in, take my phone, take my computer,

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Michelle Saahene 29:57

telling you I turned when I turned it off. I sat there and I was Like, oh my god are my thoughts, my own thoughts. But why do I, I mean, but it's good to ask yourself, why do I believe this? Who made me believe this? Where did I get this thought from? But I would argue, no, I mean, and I think it also is an indication that maybe a lot of people in this country don't have a solid grounding in their value system. Because if something matters to you so much, resolutely, why does it matter to you now? Yeah, and

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Michelle Glogovac 30:27

that goes so deep what, you know, whether we're talking about racism, abortion, you know, we're okay. You're okay with, you know, saving the lives and you know, of a fetus. But then there's the mother involved in who the rapist, the poor white kid who did whatever. And that's just the example I'm using, because I'm in the Bay Area. And you know, we've got like Brock Turner at Stanford who a poor, rich

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Michelle Saahene 30:50

white boy, what, yeah, right.

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Michelle Glogovac 30:54

It's this kind of nonsense of Yeah, where are your values, because you're not looking clearly at any of this. And I want to say they're, they're actually over complicating it, because we're all people, we're all humans. So it's as simple as that treat people equally. My son, he's six, and my husband's traveling right now. And we were in the car, driving a soccer practice. And now we're in California, and all of a sudden on the radio, Lima is doing an interview. He's running for attorney general in Texas. Oh, wow. And I'm like, wait, I know His voice. And so we listened to it. And he's talking, you know, about Black Lives Matter and whatnot. And the drive was only like a five minute drive. And so as we FaceTime my husband that night, my six year old, says, Daddy, when I grow up, I'm going to tell people to treat each other kindly and equally, because black lives matter. And yes, all lives matter. But our black friends, they matter and they should be treated equally. Oh, and I was like, the six year old gets it. So why can't you older people get it.

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Michelle Saahene 31:58

You know, it's it's, the young mind is so beautiful, because it hasn't had all those decades of, of that have that

conditioning, you know, if I had had some stronger guidance when I was younger, I probably wouldn't have had to spend so many years undoing my internalized anti blackness, internalized white supremacy, you know, prosit processing the shame and the guilt that I felt for having racist thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. But I also had parents that were from Africa. So they're from Ghana, and they just didn't understand racism, either. They, they didn't get it. And so they, they came here and had to experience that. And that's why it's so important to have these conversations at a young age. Because, I mean, it's like, I mean, think about it, it's like, when you eat like crap your entire life, you get to be 60 years old, you have you know, you you, you have a heart attack, it's gonna take a long time to get your health to optimum health, and you've spent the last 50 years destroying your body, right? It doesn't, you know, you have to be so intentional with turning that around. And I think the same way about our mentality about race and racism, we have been fed so many little lies and conditioned in such a, a conspicuous and very shady way from birth, that it is so hard. I mean, we have racist thoughts in our head that we probably that we don't even know aren't there. Because it's just it's like a like a little dropper drip, drip, drip, drip little by little by little, all the time in our education. I mean, growing up, I didn't learn anything about any black people I learned about MLK, Rosa Parks and Jackie Robinson as if they were like the only three black people that existed and did anything good.

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Michelle Glogovac 33:37

I did a research paper on Malcolm X. So I know him to

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Michelle Saahene 33:41

get and it's like, I didn't I didn't know about Malcolm X. I wasn't talking about him. I didn't know about Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, my Angelo, nobody, but those three people that I've mentioned. And when you teach history in that way, subconsciously, what does that tell children? The way people were the ones who did most of the good things, and there may be like, you know, a few black people, you know, peppered in here that that that did some things. But you know, their history really just started as slavery and like here they are now, and we just can't figure out why they can't get it together. And no one talks about the truth. And I think I really need people to understand that. Even just having the conversation and the end, the education piece is so threatening to these systems that profit off of oppressing people, that they are banning books across the country right now. I know the author of one of the books, when it was Rhoda. She is an angel. She's an Ethiopian refugee and she just made a nice little children's book and it doesn't really have much to do with race. It's just about you know, like loving yourself and loving what you look like and they ban that book. It's disgusting. They're in Tennessee you can get a fine a teacher can get fined for talking about race in the classroom.

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Michelle Glogovac 34:55

So it was just a principle fired because he was accused of teaching critical race theory and they fire them.

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Michelle Saahene 35:00

See, which is insane to me, because critical race theory is a highly academic, it's a graduate level study, and no elementary school or even High School is, is teaching it not even at undergrad, are they teaching it, you have to opt into that opt into being, you know, learning about that at the graduate level. So people don't even know what that means. So it's just so absurd. They just hear the word race and they freak the freak out. But,



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Michelle Glogovac 35:27

but that brings up a great point, too, is that there's all of these words that are coming up that people don't truly understand the definition, like white privilege, white fragility, you know, like white privilege. Yeah, I spoke about it just the other day, where I did not have to speak up, you know, for 3738 years, I didn't feel the need to speak up. I didn't, you know, but now I am. And that was the privilege that I had was that I didn't have to, I didn't have to defend anyone, you know, because this wasn't my life. You know, nothing was happening to me in this moment that I needed to address. And that's what white privilege is. white fragility is like the woman the barista for you or the woman on the TEDx panel who once I started talking to her, and she physically is like, touching her shirt. And you know, pulling it away, like it's getting hot in here. Yeah, you are physically uncomfortable at what is being said. Yeah, and that's what that is. But these words, people are like, Oh, I don't get it. So why don't you know, I'm not privileged?

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Michelle Saahene 36:34

Yep. They don't, they have no idea. And sometimes I try to, I try to wonder if there's a better word to use. But I'm like, I like the word itself is not offensive. So I don't I'm like, I feel like it's the most appropriate word to use. I can't think of anything else. But a lot of us have privileged. Listen, I have privilege. I have privilege, actually, as an African. Even though I was born and raised in this country, and I'm, I'm a black American, I was born in Harrisburg hospital. I have African parents, and when people hear my name, and realize that I'm African, and I look African, they treat me differently. That is, that is that is a real thing. And I, I mean, I've had so I went into so many jobs where I was one of the only people, most of the times I was one of the only black people at the job. And I would always ask myself, Where's everybody else. And I realized, even in those moments, my privilege of being African, and there's, I mean, I would do my own sociological experiments where I'd be in a room full of white people in high school, or college or, or just random places throughout my life and my travels. And I would notice that people wouldn't want to make eye contact with me, they would act like I wasn't in the room, they wouldn't want to talk to me. And it would be, I could physically feel it was a visceral feeling like this person does not like me. And I have a really good feeling. It's because I'm black. And I would do an experiment and I would make it a point to kind of like somehow slip into the conversation that I was African and Michelle I the the demeanor and the energy that that they exhibited would change in seconds. And suddenly I was interesting. Suddenly, they wanted to know more, suddenly, I was I was good enough to actually make eye contact with because they were interested in who I was, that happens. And so I recognize that even as an African, I have privilege in the sense that I can get into spaces and be accepted. And I mean, it's very weird. It's it's still racism. But there's a privilege there that once they see me as something foreign, I'm somehow now interesting. And that opens more doors for me. And that's left up. Yeah. And so if we can't have me as a person of color as a black woman, could I admit that I have privilege if you as a white person can admit that then you're just you're just you are willfully ignorant? Yes. I mean,

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Michelle Glogovac 39:03

yeah. And I wish that more would understand that you know, it.

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Michelle Saahene 39:07

It's just what you don't have to go through with McClaren your skin. If you're white. You don't have to deal with racism. You just do not. You have the privilege of being believed at the doctor's office. Actually, right now I am in the middle of conversing with an OB GYN that I used to have that ignored my, my concerns. I wanted to be tested for fertility when I was like 30 or 31. And they were like, Oh, I'm sure you're fine. And I was like, Yeah, but I just wanted the emergency room for severe period of cramps a few months ago, I put this like not normal and they're like, once you get your period every month around the same time I'm like, Yeah, like Oh, you're probably fine. Like No, but this like,

something can't be right. I got tested recently I did a fertility test in the past month or so. And I have a little egg reserve. And I'm only 34 and so I'm letting them know I'm like you know, I don't know if this has anything to do with race. But that's just even like one more element like what if what if I was neglected because there is so much bias in healthcare. It is staggering. It's one of the reasons why black people don't trust the pharmaceutical industries. They don't trust the medical industries. It's a lot of reasons why black people don't go to the doctor until it's too late because of all the terrible things that happen to them in hospitals and doctors offices. And I have to wonder, was I dismissed? Because you just didn't feel like simply ordering a test just even even if there was nothing wrong, which there was I went to the ER for cramps. That's not normal. Yeah, but what's the problem with me being 31, and just wanting to check my fertility with all of the toxins that are in the environment and whatnot? Like, what's the problem with just like, letting this patient check where her you know what her reserve is, they just ignored me. And for three years, I'm losing vital eggs here, Michelle, I'm losing anything. I'm losing eggs every month. And I just find out I you know, find out I have low egg reserve, and I'm emailing them. And I'm like, I could have found this out potentially three years ago. Yeah, you could have frozen a lot of stuff. I could have frozen a lot of things years ago. And you're just like, oh, you're probably fine. And I it's one of the reasons I mean, it's because I don't go to the doctor that that much anymore. I had to take my health into my into my own hands. I used to, you know, they were throwing pills at me and all kinds of things. And you didn't take my issue seriously, I had an upper gi to figure out why I had chronic acid reflux at 24 years old and no one ever asked to like, ask me, you know, are you okay? Are you stressed? What's your home life? Like, are you? What's your lifestyle style, like, I mean, I was eating like crap, I was binge drinking, like off, like, you know, and I just realized that I to optimize my health, I was gonna have to do a lot of things myself, because I never really felt heard or seen. And I know that's not just an issue for black people. That's just our medical industry altogether. But being more into what's been going on with black people in the medical industry, in this country, there were times where I'm reading this book right now called medical apartheid by Harriet a Washington and I now understand why black Americans are so skeptical of health care, because there were times where, like, Africans were bought solely for the purpose of medical experimentation. People don't know that. The things that I'm reading in this book, I have to I like read a chapter and have to put it down and digest what I just read for myself, you know, people escaped, plenty people escaped plantations. And really, I don't even want to use the word plantation anymore if there was a slavery, slave labor camp, so people would escape the slave labor camps because they couldn't handle any more the medical experiments that were being done on them. Like we would not be where we are today and medical research and, and medical investment, if it weren't for all of the non consenting enslaved people who have to be subjected to these experiments without anesthesia. It's just

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Michelle Glogovac 42:51

it's so disgusting. It's just so

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Michelle Saahene 42:54

yeah,

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Michelle Glogovac 42:55

wherein you know, to go back, we're talking about human beings, the differences, the color of your skin, the color of my skin, we're all different. And it's just so it's disturbing and disgusting, that anyone could see past the fact that you're your human being, the end,

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Michelle Saahene 43:14

B ends the end, what do you think that that would be like for you? It's, um, it's really interesting, because I think that that's another reason why, you know, when you asked, you know, why can't you see that? I mean, I'm reading too many books at one time, I need to stop doing that. Again, I'm also reading this book by rest my mannequin called my grandmother's hands, and it's about trauma. He's a, he's a therapist, and he deals with, specifically with with trauma in the body. And, you know, he says, it's not just black people that are traumatized by race and by racism, when people are traumatized. That's why you'll see such a visceral reaction from people having conversations about race and how they get so uncomfortable because we need to remember that when we Europeans came here, they were fleeing persecution and oppression and brutality in Europe. And that's not talked about either. They came here and again, when you don't heal trauma, you repeat it. So they came here and they started to do the same things to other people that were done to them. A lot of what was happening is that you know, what they did to other people wasn't really new. I mean, I mean, they got you know, innovative with it, but they had, there was things that was that had already been done to them and their and their ancestors, and so you're not just traumatized by when someone something happens to you, you're traumatized by also witnessing it. Imagine being a kid in the in the 50s and going to a park because your whole town and neighborhood is going to go watch this black man hanging from a tree and you're 10 that's not that's gonna that's traumatic for you and then no one around you is talking about it that is acting like this is normal, and generation after generation after generation of doing traumatic things to people also traumatizing You. And so sometimes I think to myself, maybe some of the white people who really get it, maybe their ancestors were people who just didn't do as much traumatizing as other white people, you know, in the country, you know, I mean, like, literally,

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Michelle Glogovac 45:15

I hope so that that I mean, that's something that would make you proud, right?

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Michelle Saahene 45:20

Makes sense, because for me, I know that it's, it's not as difficult for me to do this work as it wouldn't be potentially for an African American descendant of an enslaved person, it is going to be much, it's going to be a harder thing for them to do than it is for me as just like, it's going to be harder for me to do this work than it would be for you. Because I'm the person that's still experiencing it, as someone who's a black American and descendant of slavery has more of that generational trauma than I do when it comes to this particular topic. And this, this, this particular issue, so, you know, When, when, when white people are experiencing, you know, you said earlier, you know, how, you know, you were talking to someone about raising another white woman, and she's grabbing out her shirt, and she's getting uncomfortable, who knows what has happened in her family history that is making her so uncomfortable, did a lot of her family, you know, witnessed a lot of, you know, uncomfortable things, and just never learned how to deal with it, never learn how to talk about it, and that, you know, and that's the living living within her, I know, people who, it's not hard for them to talk about, like people because, you know, I found out that, you know, their ancestors were abolitionists, you know, and so that's, that's also in their part of their genetic makeup, you know, just wanting to set people free. And so, you know, they're, it's easy for them to get into a conversation. And so, I think it's important that all of us do that, that that trauma work, because we feel each other's trauma. Like when I wanted to that, that Teresa and I and I asked her why she called the cops, I felt how uncomfortable she was that that energy, like, bounced off her body and hit me and I was like, oh, something's happening here. Like she's, she's feeling something, even though she's not the one that experienced the racism. But when you do traumatic things to somebody, it also affects you, we're not supposed to be even though this unfortunately, is part of the human makeup. Unfortunately, it's something you know, this this, this, this evilness, it's still incredibly damaging to our neurological systems, to our mental health to our emotional health. And we're all suffering. And you know, when when people say, you know, we just want to stop talking about race, well, then, well, then, you know, we all need to heal together. Because the fact that you want to stop talking about it so badly means that you are also hurt by it, somehow, somehow. Because you're avoiding, and you only try to avoid things. If it's, you know, if it's something that's, that's, that's hurting you.

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Michelle Glogovac 47:52

That's a really nice way to put it. Honestly.

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Michelle Saahene 47:58

I try, I'm really I try to get people to, you know, because in the beginning of this, of me, being an activist, I was angry a lot, and I still get angry all the time. But I was entering conversations in a way that I, that I that that wasn't necessarily opening doors. And I was not answering conversations that would allow people to express what they believed and what they felt, even if I didn't like it, because I needed I realized, like, I need to understand where this person is coming from, if I want to help them get on the path of anti racism, I need to know what they believe I need to know where they get that, you know, you know that that that thought from and they need to understand where they got that thought from me just telling them, you're dumb. Is, is one, it's just brutal, but it's also just shutting down conversation. And we need to learn how to open up conversation as opposed to shut it, I see a lot of people just shutting down conversation. And even though it's frustrating, and even though you don't, you know, it's hard to not be judgmental, because you're like, How on earth can you think this, you have to remember that, again, go back to what they're trying to do now with banning the books and not allowing people, you know, firing principals and finding teachers. The control of information is so deep, that there really are people who don't know much about anything until they get to their 50s because the control of information is very calculated. Otherwise, they wouldn't be banning books and firing people for mentioning race. I mean, now here in Texas, you don't even have to teach that like the KKK was morally wrong. Really? Yes. Yes. And again, people also need to remember that if you are someone of privilege, it is easy for you to it's harder for you to believe that the country where you are thriving is lying to you. Because you know what, once you start to go down that rabbit hole, I've talked to a people who were like, Michelle, I'm gonna be honest with you. I was depressed for three months. I said why? And they were like, because I realized that my life was a lie. Oh, oh, yeah, well, it is Sally. It is a lie. You know, because we are all you know, we are all lied to to such a deep degree that I was talking with them actress, actress actress Melissa benoist. That was the first one to admit that to me, we were on a live and she admitted it in front of everyone. She was like, I got depressed because I realized I've been living in a, in a, in a bubble in a fake world. And I don't know how many people have heard along the way, by ignoring what was right in front of me, but I didn't see it because we've been conditioned to not see it. And so it's it's very deep, it's very calculated, I recommend that podcast, it's going to blow your minds learn about all the ways in which you know, we really praise these founding fathers, but we need to remember that they were all they all owned human beings. own human beings, they all raked the beings that they that they owned, and they all made laws to continue to enslave the people that they were raping, enslaving, you know, torturing, and even their children when they would have children with these, you know, with these enslaved women, their children would stay slaves. Right? It was so it's so weird. So we need to, it's like it's just rethinking the reality of, of where we live. Because if we really want to live in a country, that's great. Then we need to learn how to be radically honest because we are we are imploding, I think it's pretty easy to see that. things aren't going well here. really scared, to say the least. And that's because there aren't honest conversations.

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Michelle Glogovac 51:55

I appreciate you. And I appreciate that you're willing to have these honest conversations and that you came on to talk to me today. I really do appreciate it. And I am so glad that we've gotten to meet and I want to keep having these conversations with you.

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Michelle Saahene 52:00

M Michelle Saahene 52:09

Yeah, definitely I know I talked a lot but I get I get so I'm so passionate about all this and I just want people to understand that, you know, we can make this country better. And it starts with the individual. It starts with us looking at ourselves looking in the mirror, picking up these books, picking up these podcasts, turning off the shame and the guilt even though those those feelings are normal, they're natural, they're going to happen, but channel that and remind yourself that this is these are systems put in place on purpose and so once you realize that, you know once you realize that it's not necessarily your your fault, you can turn that shame and I and I go into action and actually be a force for good and if lots of people around you to to join you on this path.

M Michelle Glogovac 52:56

I love that. Can you share with everyone where they can find you please?

M Michelle Saahene 53:00

Yeah, you can find me on two different pages my activist page is at is from privilege to progress, that's at PRIV to PROG and then my personal page is at Michelle so heen I ch e L l e, s, a, H, E and

M Michelle Glogovac 53:21

E. Amazing. Thank you so much, Michelle.

M Michelle Saahene 53:24

Thank you, Michelle.

M Michelle Glogovac 53:26

It's not every day you get to hear from to Michelle's and I felt this conversation was such a special one. Michelle and I have found a new friendship and I'm really looking forward to collaborating more with her. We need to keep having conversations, educating ourselves and others and doing so in a way that enlightens people, ways that sparkle light that make people think about what truly is going on right in front of them. One also allows them to understand and work through the trauma they might have experienced as well. Racism is deeply embedded in our society. And although we're breaking through and making positive changes, a lot more work needs to be done. I invite you to have these conversations to learn more and to do better. Thank you for joining Michelle night today and until next week, give yourself a hug for what you've been through, recognize other humans and what they've been through and let's work together on healing.