

Women at Warp Episode 32 Transcript: “Past Tense”

Jarrah: Hi and welcome to Women at Warp. Join us as our crew of four-women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name's Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. Today, with us, we have crew members, Grace.

Grace: Hey, everybody.

Jarrah: And Sue.

Sue: Hiya, hiya.

Jarrah: We also have a very special guest, Michelle Toven. She's a blogger at *treknews.net*, so welcome Michelle. And, Michelle, why don't you tell us a little bit more about yourself, like how you first got into *Star Trek*?

Michelle: Sure. Well, it's not too much of an exciting story. People have been telling me I should watch it forever. So, a couple years ago, I started and now I've just been going through all of the *Star Trek* ever. I am almost done. I have half of *Enterprise* left and after that, just the animated series.

Jarrah: Awesome.

Grace: Wow. Nice trekking along there.

Jarrah: And what is your favorite series?

Jarrah: *TNG*.

Grace: Nice.

Sue: Hoo.

Jarrah: Today, we are going to actually talk about *Deep Space Nine*, which we asked Michelle here because we're talking about a particular episode that she actually published an article about on Priority1 website, I believe.

Michelle: Yes.

Jarrah: And the episode is the two-parter, *Past Tense*. But before we get into that, just have to remind you about the Women at Warp Patreon. You can go to patreon.com/womenatwarp and pledge a donation. And that even a small amount gets you access to our exclusive bonus content. Like most recently, we did a live watch-through of *Star Trek: Nemesis*. And it also helps support our work. It helps us do things like host our own website and make sure that we're promoting the podcast at conventions and that sort of thing. So, we really appreciate your support. And if you want to become a patron and you're not already, that's patreon.com/womenatwarp.

So, *Past Tense* is a *Deep Space Nine* episode or two episodes in season 3. Okay, so we had a lot of listener comments from Facebook. It seems to be an episode that provokes a lot of thoughts and feelings in people. So, Sue, do you want to maybe read-- [crosstalk]

Grace: It's definitely provocative.

Jarrah: Yeah. Do you want to maybe read the comment from Sam?

Sue: Absolutely. Sam writes, "This is hands down my favorite episode. My 13-year-old son and I watch it and talk about the sociopolitical implications." That is a very smart 13-year-old. [laughs] That's my comment.

Grace: Nice. Way to go.

Sue: "He's very astute in his observations. We've come to the conclusion that it just may not be that far off what could happen in our country as a result of this year's election. Keeping it apolitical here by not specifically mentioning a candidate." [laughs]

Jarrah: Definitely some other people mentioned candidates.

Sue: Yeah. But I have to say, Sam, when I was rewatching this this week, I was thinking a very, very similar thing.

Grace: Yeah, it's hard not to right now.

Jarrah: And there's some more discussion, but before we get into that, maybe we should start with a brief synopsis. Does anyone want to take a stab at it?

Grace: I can give it a shot. Basically, the gist of the episode is the main crew of *Deep Space Nine* is headed to San Francisco for a big event. And when being beamed down, Dax, Bashir and Sisko all have an accident in the transporter. Something completely new and unprecedented.

Sue: I love a good transporter malfunction.

Grace: I know, right?

Sue: Almost as good as a holodeck malfunction. [laughs]

Grace: Well, thankfully, we don't have as many of those in *Deep Space Nine*, but essentially what happens is they are sent back in time to the mid-21st century. Yeah? And they end up in San Francisco, which is where they were shooting for, but not when and essentially, they are mistaken for vagrants. And Dax is almost instantly taken in by a rich young gentleman who wants to help her. Meanwhile, Bashir and Sisko are both taken to what is essentially a ghetto and are left there because it's assumed that they are either homeless, mentally ill or just in need of government assistance. And we discover that in this point of time, that was the norm. All those people were sent and put in this locked area.

Meanwhile, Sisko, while trying to figure out what's going on who, as it turns out, is a big history buff when it comes to Earth, realizes that they have arrived just days before the historical Bell Riots, in which there's going to be some massive-- What's a word for shenanigans that are bad?

Jarrah: Massive bad shenanigans.

Sue: Civil uprisings?

Grace: Calamity. That's the word I'm looking for.

Jarrah: Civil unrest, yeah.

Grace: There's going to be some massive riots coming up in those ghettos soon. So basically, what Sisko remembers is there's a hostage situation involving a guy named Bell. Bell is the guy who keeps the hostage situation from escalating while riots go on outside of the building where the hostages are taken. Unfortunately, while they are fighting their way around, a guy gets killed. A guy who turns out his name is Bell. So, Sisko realizes in order to keep history happening, someone's got to take over the role of Bell, who ended up dying at the end of the Bell Riots.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's basically part 1. So, Ira Steven Behr adapted a story idea from Robert Hewitt Wolfe, and it originally started as a story about homelessness and how we disregard the homeless. But Ira Steven Behr came up with this idea and his inspiration for the ghetto, which is called the Sanctuary District. He says in the Season 3 DVD special features. "I was down in Santa Monica one day, and there were all these homeless people there. And it was a beautiful day. The ocean, sky, sun, and homeless people everywhere. And all these tourists and people up and about, and they were just walking past these homeless people as if they were part of the scenery. It was like some artist had done some interesting rendition of juxtaposition between nature and urban decay right there in front of me, and the fact that nobody seemed to care at all. And I said, 'There has to be something about that. Where does that go? How far do you take that?' And that evolved into the idea for concentration camps, essentially for the homeless."

Grace: And what's interesting is I can't honestly remember for the life of me the source on this, but supposedly a little while after the episode aired, there was a proposal in Los Angeles, I think, to make a designated homeless area for them to just send homeless people to. So sometimes, art imitating life and life imitating art is not the best thing.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's on Memory Alpha. And one of our commenters on Facebook pointed that out as well. Yeah, there was an interview with Alexander Siddig about how surreal it was to be filming this episode while that exact thing was basically being proposed not far away.

Grace: Another comment we got was someone bringing up the fact that Dax, a white woman, is instantly picked up by a philanthropic-feeling man whereas Bashir, an Indian guy, and Sisko, a black man, are both instantly sent away to the crime-y zone. And there's no way that was a coincidence. That's generally pretty agreed upon by people who've seen the episode, that the white woman is taken care of, the not white people are sent away to an imprisoned zone.

Jarrah: I believe that Bashir is supposed to be Arabic or of Arabic descent, obviously, like British Arabic, when we meet his parents.

Sue: I think what was really striking to me, especially about part 1 of this episode, is that they're in 2024, they're eight years from right now. And that's makes it more real, I think. It makes it more scary.

Jarrah: Yeah. Because, I mean, I would say the least believable part of this in terms of how the episode has aged, is just the computers, that they seem really clunky and worse than we have today. But everything else about it is something that you could totally see happening.

Sue: It seems really plausible.

Jarrah: Yeah. And Ira Steven Behr actually deliberately did that in terms of having Bashir and Sisko be under suspicion, whereas Dax gets rescued. He says, "The simple fact is that a beautiful white woman is always going to get much better treatment than two brown-skinned men."

Sue: Even if she has tattoos on her face.

Grace: And it's horrible proof of the fact that an extraterrestrial lifeform has a better chance of being helped out when they're poor in San Francisco than a pair of not white people.

Jarrah: Yeah. So, Michelle, what did you think about part 1? Have any key moments or scenes that you really appreciated?

Michelle: The race thing was a big one for me because I rewatched these after a lot of like the riots in Ferguson and Baltimore a year ago. So, that stood out to me a lot, was people of color getting picked on out in public by the authorities. So, the security guards, definitely. And also, the prescience, I guess, of them knowing how important social media and the internet and technology would be in playing a role in this sort of thing and letting those people tell their stories. That's really part 2 though.

Jarrah: I really appreciated, I guess through both parts but it starts in part one, with the middle-class people like the guards and the social worker who works in the district office and just their various ways of navigating the system that they're in, and they realize it's not great, but they feel like they're powerless to change it. And I love getting to see Sisko and Bashir together in this episode. Like, Bashir is at this point just coming into his own as a character.

And I think the scene that really gives me the most feels is the one where he and Sisko are walking through the Sanctuary District. And Sisko is explaining that basically people have given up, that the social problems that they face, which I would say, like, the social problems we face, seem too enormous to deal with. And then, Bashir is really indignant. He says, "Causing people to suffer because you hate them is terrible. But causing people to suffer because you have forgotten how to care, that's really hard to understand." And Sisko delivers the message that, "They'll remember. It'll take some time and it won't be easy, but eventually people in the century will remember how to care."

And obviously, that's a pretty classic *Star Trek* exchange right there. But I find it really meaningful given that, as we'll talk about, the issues we're seeing are issues we are actually facing in our society today.

Michelle: But going back to those other characters, I like how in this episode, none of them are vilified or portrayed as completely evil or anything. They're just people, like Jarrah said, trying to navigate the system. They just don't know what's going on. They've become complacent, and they're just doing their jobs.

Grace: We get some great interactions between Bashir and Sisko and them. When they first are found, the guards are like, "Do we turn them in, or do we just turn in early for the day?" And one's like, "I want to get home." And the other one's like, "Yeah, but we got to do our job." Then, when they're talking to the social worker, there's the whole thing of her being like, "Oh, I know I shouldn't use these rude phrases, but it's a habit." It's very much showing that a bunch of these people, they're just doing their job. They aren't out to get anyone. They aren't actively evil. They're just a part of a system that isn't working.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: Yeah. The "rude phrases" really stuck out to me, stood out to me, I guess. I appreciate that they didn't use anything that we would consider a slur today or even when the episode aired, but they chose words that you could see becoming those terms. Often when sci-fi invents slang, it just feels silly. But I thought that the terms they use, especially the "dime," I thought it was really effective to the point of, it made me uncomfortable every time I heard it.

Jarrah: Yeah. And the gimmes are basically people who-- [crosstalk].

Grace: For the people in need of assistance.

Jarrah: Yeah, yeah. They're like people they're not breaking the law. They're not mentally ill, but yet they're still vilified for being poor. I think this is actually a super cool episode to discuss the concept of intersectionality because there are-- [crosstalk]

Grace: Definitely.

Jarrah: There's issues with class, there's issues with race, there's issues with mental health and in terms of how much you conform to what's expected of you in this system.

Grace: And how much if you are only given a certain level to which you can conform, you're going to be stuck kind of conforming to it.

Sue: And I think this is one of the first times I ever remember the doctor and not the counselor making comments about treating people's mental health.

Jarrah: Yeah. Michelle, what did you think about this episode? And I mean, both parts, we'll synopsise part 2 in a bit, but in terms of the treatment and depiction of the "dims."

Michelle: It's a little too much what we see even going on today. Because Bashir makes the comment, "Even in this time, there's effective treatment for them. With the right medicine, they could live a full and normal life. They don't need to be out on the streets." And even in our world, people will get locked up, they'll be put in jail or somewhere rather than getting the treatment they need because we're always so short in beds in mental health hospitals and the government is just overworked and underfunded and doesn't have the resources to take care of everybody, much like we see in this episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. I think it was really important that be an aspect of this, because you're right. Certainly, I used to work for an elected official, and a large chunk of the casework was people coming in with mental health issues who just had exhausted all their options and the district office that we see the massive lines and making you fill out 20 pages of ridiculous forms and that you would have got better treatment if you were like a gimme versus a dim. That is not an inaccurate representation of a social services office today, even in Canada.

And people with mental health issues are sometimes they can be less able to advocate for themselves or they can have harder times, like waiting in a crowded room with a whole bunch of people for hours or determining a form. And so, there's all these additional barriers that make it harder for those people in an already hard situation.

Grace: Yeah. When I was in college, I worked as an intern at a welfare assistance center. So, I can tell you the scene when they're talking to the social worker and there's a point of her again saying, "I know I shouldn't be using these words, but it's easier to categorize that way," essentially, that is not uncommon. It's uncomfortable to be there and it definitely is uncomfortable for the people who are there looking for assistance." And it's unfortunately something that happens a lot.

Jarrah: Yeah, it's almost like the system makes it harder for people to obtain any benefits and they're trying-- under the premise, I guess, of trying to keep costs down, they make people jump through all these hoops. But then, you end up in a worse situation, in worse health, unable to get on your feet because you haven't even been granted like the least shred of dignity.

Grace: There are some services that are made especially hard to seek because the harder they are to seek, the less people are going to go through all the way to try and get them and the less people they have to provide that service to.

Michelle: Oh, even in my own life, there are examples of this. I have a couple people I care about with some serious mental health issues. And one of them, to get treatment, he had to say that he was suicidal to even be admitted anywhere. He couldn't just get the minimum amount because they didn't have any openings there. So, the hoops you have to jump through, the extra lengths you have to go to get treatment are just ridiculous.

Grace: Yeah. One of my loved ones has some mobility impairment and just in order to get-- to pretty much be counted as someone who has a disability, they were told, "Go in to get marked as disabled, but go in on your worst day possible. Go in when everything physically looks wrong with you." And this was an official counselor giving them this advice, saying that was the best way to get the help they needed.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely.

Sue: There are so many systems and services that exist but are not publicized. And in order to even receive them for people who need them, you really have to be an advocate for yourself. And there are so many people who can't do that because the systems are so complicated, because there might be other issues at play. And it's as true in this example of *Star Trek* as it is in the real world. I know people who are working adults with juris doctors who are on food stamps because of the current employment situation. And it's just mind blowing in a lot of ways.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. So, the other group that we see in part one is Dax's rich friends, including the I find quite bland Chris Brenner, although he looks-- [crosstalk]

Grace: Exceptionally bland.

Jarrah: Slightly Bowie-ish, which is the only thing he has going for him. But his casting maybe my only issue with this episode. But what did you think of what happens when, in the first part, Dax goes to the fancy party and then finds out that her friends might be in the Sanctuary District?

Michelle: Oh, man, that seems the worst because you have all these rich people standing around in these opulent settings with their really weird, ostentatious clothing. You have one guy making a comment about how they had to cancel their trip to Europe because of student protests in France and how Europe's falling apart, but nothing like that would ever happen here.

Grace: I love that with Dax who, even though she has gotten the best of the situation, she's the one that we get to see go, "Really, really? You're going to just ignore-- my friends have been put in a special district. I can't find them. I got mugged this morning. I don't know what's going on here. And you think this is okay?" I love that we get to see Dax get indignant at that.

Sue: I just love it when she looks him right in the eye and says, "Then why is there a wall?"

Jarrah: Yeah, exactly. If they're just there to get food and housing, and we see that, of course, like in the district, once people are out of sight, then the authorities have no incentive to do anything for them other than contain them. So, there's gangs roaming the street,

stealing people's food carts. You're lining up for hours, you're sleeping on the street because people with guns have taken over the best buildings.

Grace: There's no healthcare, there's limited access to food.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: But supposedly, if you have a criminal record, you're not allowed in the Sanctuary District.

Grace: Supposedly.

Sue: But the situation that you're in once you're there still is creating crime and violence.

Grace: If you weren't a criminal going in, you probably will be at some point while you're there.

Jarrah: So, I'll just give a quick rundown on part two and we can keep discussing some of these themes. So, part 1 ends when Sisko has decided to take over the role of Gabriel Bell. He and Bashir and this guy named Webb, who's just a straightforward, kind of working-class guy, used to be a chemical plant manager, and his whole family is living in the Sanctuary District. And they've gone around and they're starting to spread the word to people that there's going to be a protest, but their goal is to stop there from being violence. And then, BC who is the head of the ghosts that we meet, which is like basically-- [crosstalk]

Grace: -gang members, yeah, pretty much.

Jarrah: Yeah. Fedorated gang members.

[laughter]

Grace: Say no more.

Jarrah: I love it when Sisko tells them, "I don't like your hat." And so, him and Bell are in this uneasy role in control of the center and in control of the hostages. And Bell/Sisko and Bashir are there to try to prevent him from killing any of the hostages and to try to instead adopt Webb's strategy, which is to get out everyone's stories to the public, but they keep being blocked from the interwebs.

Grace: Wait, wait, wait. The poor people's access to communication is somehow is an issue here? That's completely new and different, I've got to say.

Jarrah: Yeah. And they're negotiating with a detective who seems a little bit sympathetic, but the governor wants to order in troops anyway. Luckily, meanwhile, Dax is able to get her friends, who basically risk his career to get them all internet access. And the people start telling their stories, and the stories are aired to the world. The National Guard orders a strike, and Sisko jumps in front of the mean jerky guard and saves his life. Webb gets killed, and the guard lets Bashir and Sisko sneak away and pretend that they were killed because he's grateful for what they did. And he says he'll tell the truth about what happened here.

Luckily, by this point, Kira and O'Brien, who are in a weird little subplot where they beam down in different periods of history and try and see if their crew members are there.

Grace: It's a light interlude that we need to get through the episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, it's adorable. They found them. And so, then they all go back to the Defiant and everything's great. And except for that in the history books, now Gabriel Bell looks like Sisko. So, just another point about the background. The inspiration for the Bell Riots, part of the plot for Ira Steven Behr, was the 1971 riot in New York's Attica Prison, which was caused primarily by inmates' demands for more humane living conditions being ignored by the authorities. So, that was cool. But of course, it could be a lot of things. Like, Michelle, you were mentioning the issues like Ferguson and Black Lives Matter protests, also Occupy. We've seen a lot of these protests and issues over the last few years, but in that way, it was kind of prophetic.

Michelle: I think race plays into this a little more too, because the person they choose to represent them in the episode is Webb. Sisko even makes a comment, "He has the face," meaning, "He's white, he looks middle class, he has the family. So, people will take him more seriously."

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. I really like some of the subtlety in the script. I mean, I guess it's not super, super subtle, but I agree. Like, Sisko knew that if it was him, I mean, in addition to the history-muddling effects that people might be less likely to sympathize because the people he's trying to get onside are wealthier, whiter people.

Sue: I just love that they're not even pretending that we'll be living in a post-racial society by 2024.

Jarrah: No.

Sue: And it's a good thing that they're not pretending that, because there is still so far to go. And we see, or maybe just I see *Star Trek* as a goal for humanity. And so much of the history that we get are the good things that happen in *Star Trek*. And we're finally seeing some of the difficult stuff that humanity has to go through to get to those points.

Jarrah: Yeah, it kind of in a way reminded me of *Mirror, Mirror* but with us, where you have these people go back and they take on roles in the society and end up delivering a message about how things can be different. If you, in this case, tell the story about what really happened here, but in both cases, stand up for justice and equality.

Grace: It's very interesting to see a story where our society is the worst-case scenario.

[laughter]

Oh, that was dark.

Jarrah: I mean, if it weren't for the little Kira-O'Brien interludes. It actually is a dark episode because the very last line is-- [crosstalk]

Grace: Incredibly dark, yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah. Bashir asks Sisko, basically he's like, "There's one thing I still don't get. How could they have let things get so bad?" And Sisko is like, "I don't know." And that's the ending. And it's basically a challenge to us. But in this part, we get the social worker whose name is Lee, and she turns out to be hypoglycemic. So, Bashir gives her some medical treatment and she's like shocked that he's a doctor. But then, she believes him and she tells him this story about a woman who came in with a warrant because she had abandoned a child she couldn't afford to care for, and that she let the woman just disappear into the district instead of having her arrested. "I think about her all the time. And ever since then, I've just

done my job," because she found it too much of a burden to have to personally care about all these awful cases she was seeing.

Sue: She also almost got fired for it.

Grace: Yeah. I'm trying to remember what the legal term is, but there's a specific term in the legal world and the world of people working in this health and assistance where you need to have sort of a layer of apathy between you and whoever you're working with. Or else, just the emotional level of the work you are doing will crush you and will just wreck you.

Sue: Like a detachment. Yeah.

Grace: Yes, exactly. And that's what she's talking about here.

Michelle: That seems to be what's happening with society as a whole in this episode too. People just don't know what's happening. And if they do, they just either don't care or can't let themselves care because it seems too much to handle.

Jarrah: So, maybe we should throw in a few more Facebook comments now that we've summarized things. Sue, do you want to read the comments from Chris and Kris? Or maybe the first Chris? This is Chris with a C-H.

Sue: Yeah, I can take them both. Chris with a C-H wrote, "It's a good episode, but I'm always left wondering how the world was supposed to have evolved to that point. It's probably wise for the writers to have avoided trying to spell out something like that in much detail, but it always bugs me that it isn't explained. Like, there's something major missing from the exposition. Maybe 30 years in the future seemed far away enough to not care when this was written in the mid-90s. But now, it's only eight years away, and that feels soon enough that I'd expect to have an inkling of how it might begin to happen. Holy crap. 2024 fits within a two-term Trump presidency. Now, it all makes sense." That is Chris' comment.

[laughter]

I'm reading all the political stuff, y'all. Okay. [laughs]

Jarrah: Yeah, you can't not be political with this episode.

Sue: And then, Kris with a K responds, "I think this feeling totally depends on how secure you are in society and how close you've been to urban areas with major problems with homelessness. To my partner and I, when we watched it a couple weeks ago, it felt starkly realistic and modern. To be a poor person in America really does feel like your leaders want you to die. And to me, something like a Sanctuary District doesn't seem far off with our current political climate."

Jarrah: Yup. So, some political thoughts.

Michelle: Well, there's some parallels too in all the refugees in Europe getting locked up into camps and not being let out too. So, it's not that far off.

Sue: Yeah, well, I mean, I'm in New York City where there is definitely a homelessness problem. I believe, I don't know the statistics for sure, but I don't think it is the worst in the country. But when it is really cold in the winter, the police try and essentially, I hate to use this term, but round up the people who are on the streets to take them to shelters somewhere for the night when it gets so cold. And I didn't even realize this until maybe like eight or ten years ago that so many people who don't have homes avoid going to shelters because of

crime and because of assault and sexual assault that can occur in them. I had no idea because as a middleclass white person, I was insulated from that until I sought out the information. And it mirrors the same violence and crime and stuff that we see in the episode in the Sanctuary District.

Jarrah: Yeah. And even in cities like Vancouver, there are efforts through planning and through policing, this has changed somewhat over the past little while, but to push homeless people into certain parts of the city that are like away from tourists and you see this a lot around like major sporting events around the world like FIFA and the Olympics, that they'll provide more services in areas that they think that tourists aren't going to go so that they like create these things through basically like a carrot and stick approach. And then, they'll enforce various laws against sleeping on the streets or loitering or other things in other parts of the city that they don't want homeless people to be bothering tourists or business class or upper-class people they don't want to have to be bothered by this.

Grace: Yeah, I'm over in Seattle and within this past year we finally had our level of homeless population declared a citywide emergency. So, there have been a few interesting reactions to that. One of them is that there have been actual camps springing up along roadsides that have been having problems with constantly having the police try and find excuses to break them up and to just send them further and further to the corners of the city and away from central areas.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. The systems have been so ingrained and they're really intrinsically tied to capitalism and systemic racism and sexism that doesn't take Trump for the system to continue. Although certainly, I don't think that would make it better. But I'm a Canadian, so stay over here.

Grace: Lucky.

Jarrah: But it also is like-- there's another really powerful point in that scene with Bashir and the social worker where she's telling him the story and he says, "It's not your fault that things are the way they are." And she says, "Everybody tells themselves that and nothing ever changes." And that is another message to the audience. It's definitely something that I think we all struggle with, is how much do we let ourselves care?

Grace: And how much can we afford to let ourselves care?

Jarrah: Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, I think that the model that's shown in this episode is that it takes everyone getting together and listening. For the people who are marginalized, it's telling their stories, and for the people who have privilege, it's giving them the space to tell their stories. In the case of Chris Brenner, literally giving them the space and that's what they say. So, I'm not saying that is the only thing, but I think that was a cool comment.

Grace: But it's a start, yeah.

Michelle: That scene with all of them coming forward to tell their stories is one of the more powerful ones in the episode, because the people watching outside of it, who wouldn't otherwise see it, can see that they're just regular people who are down on their luck. They don't want to be gimmers. They just want a chance to get a job, get back up on their feet. They're not criminals. They're not-- Well, some of them are mentally ill, but they need help, too.

Sue: One thing that keeps coming to mind for me is that I think it's Webb who tells Sisko, "I came here because I was promised a job. That's why I'm here. [laughs] I'm not here to get free things. I'm here because I was told I would find employment if I came here."

Jarrah: But even then, there is this narrative throughout the thing where, one of their demands is to reinstate the Federal Employment Act, which I think we're supposed to understand is something that promises full employment. And this was a demand in the Civil Rights Movement that's often forgotten that Martin Luther King, Jr.'s march on Washington was not just a march for racial equality, but also a march for jobs for people of color and for the working or for the poor and underemployed. And there was a lot of work that was being done between particularly poor communities in the South and with people lobbying for civil rights for African Americans, the struggle for racial and economic justice was very tied together.

And I think that is coming out today in some of the movements in Black Lives Matter. And we're seeing connections between that movement and fight for \$15 minimum wage. So, I thought that was really interesting. But it did strike me the part where the guard, Vin, is like, "Jobs, don't you get it? There are no jobs." And Sisko as Bell is like, "They're going to have to find us jobs." What did you guys think of that?

Grace: Damn, that's a heady question.

Jarrah: I know. I'm saying this because-- [crosstalk]

Grace: I'm going to need a second here, sorry.

Jarrah: Well, I'm asking because I got to say that argument is the one that I find the hardest to know. They're like, there are lots of things you can do for people, but they really avoid spelling it out in this episode. They aren't saying the government needs to fund stimulus program, as in Keynesian economics, and create jobs through funding infrastructure programs. They don't spell any of that out or like they have no policy.

Grace: I wonder if they thought that would go over the audience's head or something.

Jarrah: And probably the goal of the thing was not to get the audience to advocate a specific model of economic change. It was to get people to think about the people that they overlook on a daily basis.

Grace: I think they were definitely trying to hammer home the idea of, "We're not entirely sure how that would work. We'll leave that to your imagination. But it is the responsibility of the government and of the people to take care of the people."

Sue: I think that's a very real reaction for that character. Even if you think about the job market today, that's because that's how it feels for people. There are no jobs. Or maybe there are 100 jobs, but there are 10,000 applicants. It's like, there's not enough to go around.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: And the feeling, at least with this episode, is that it's only going to get worse.

Jarrah: Yeah. Well, Marxist theory would say that it's an example of the ruling class basically dividing working classes against themselves, that you make these people who are basically policing the poor feel like they're in such a precarious situation that they cannot afford to lose anything. And therefore, they don't see how both they and the people underneath them are oppressed.

Sue: Well, I think it was a little bit blink and you'll miss it, but didn't that character, Webb, also say that he lost his job because he was replaced by a machine?

Jarrah: Yeah, I think you're right. Yeah.

Sue: Yeah. So, I mean, that's not a focus of this episode, but that maybe not right now, but during the Industrial Revolution was a very real and very big fear.

Jarrah: It actually is a big-- I mean, I don't know that people actively fear it right now, but there's been projections that came out that said that the staffing of offices will be drastically decreased over the next 20 years due to technological advances. And that's a huge issue. Like, a lot of jobs here in North America have been sent overseas due to free trade agreements and cheaper labor conditions and other issues due to globalization. But even these industries that we count on today, autonomous vehicles, is actually another one that is coming really quickly and that a lot of entrepreneurs are putting a lot of money into. And that stands to put like car insurance brokers, delivery drivers, all kinds of things, you look at like the gig economy.

So, people are being replaced by apps, by other types of technological advances in massive numbers, or at least their labor conditions are totally changing. So, it's no longer like you have a secure full-time job that comes with an okay wage and a pension at the end of it. Okay. [laughs]

Sue: I'm really depressed. [laughs]

Jarrah: Sorry.

Grace: Yeah, this is not one of our more upbeat episodes, but we kind of had to do it.

Jarrah: Ah, I love this episode. I find it. It's dark, but it's super important.

Sue: Oh, it is. It's just talking about it is hard. I wish I could put some cat gifs in the audio, but that's not possible.

Jarrah: Well, I did want to share-- Okay, so just on a lighter note, we had a comment from Anika who was on the episode with us a couple weeks ago saying, "The costuming is excellent." And then, Kris with a K responded, "The costumes are amazing, but Jadzia's hair looks like George Washington in a shampoo commercial." [laughter]. And I couldn't unsee it. I was like, "Her hair, what is wrong with it? And why does it stay the same over like a week?"

Sue: And it's got this one weird swoop in it that doesn't make any sense.

Grace: Yeah, I love just the clump of feathers.

Michelle: Yeah, I kept getting distracted by it.

Grace: And that is pretty true to form that the less money you have, the more ridiculous looking people with money look.

Jarrah: I love that she crawls through the sewers-- [crosstalk]

Grace: In her little suit, yeah.

Jarrah: And it comes out totally clean.

Sue: But I love that, capelet thing she's wearing with the suit that buttons up by the neck and it's open. It's so cute. [laughs]

Jarrah: Okay, so then she comes and basically rescues them or gives her information or lets Bashir and Sisko know where she is.

Grace: Girl comes out of the rich neighborhood to help the poor people. Noblesse oblige.

Jarrah: Yeah. She gets captured by two “dims” although it doesn't look like-- it looks like she went with them willingly, because she probably could have kicked both their asses and her--

Grace: Her kingdom for a Bat'leth.

Jarrah: Yeah. And so, I'm sure she knew where she was going, but they say, “She was captured.” And then BC is like, “We got a present. I think I'm in love.” And I admit that could have gone worse than it did.

Grace: Yeah. Although I do genuinely love at the beginning of the first episode-- well, at the beginning, when Dax first wakes up in the new century and is found by this guy, she is just on it, like, “Ma'am, are you okay?” “Oh, oh, I don't know. Oh, oh, I must have gotten mugged. My friends are gone. Oh, my money, my wallet. Oh, no. Will you help me?” She's just on it ad lib wise. She is able to just play it so cool. And I love that because if anyone could do that, it would be Dax.

Sue: Jadzia is super adaptable.

Jarrah: Yeah. She's like, “Oh, you mean my tattoos? Oh, they didn't take my brooch.”

Grace: Just her constant thing of, “Oh, how did you know?” She's playing this guy so well, and I love it.

Jarrah: Yeah. And then at the end, she's basically like, “You have to do this because it's the right thing to do.” And he's like, “It's like a huge risk for me.” And she's like, “Yep.” It's great. But we don't really see a lot of poor women in this episode, at least not speaking.

Grace: We don't, no.

Jarrah: Any thoughts on that or what that means?

Grace: Well, there's the fact that a big chunk of the women's homeless population, at least in the US get ignored, help-wise, for one thing. For another, there's a lot darker implications for women who are homeless. Sexual assault is considered an inevitability if you are homeless. And they might not have gone that far dark content wise but that is something that does come up a lot when you are talking about homeless women. And there's a whole another sack of problems when you are talking about women who are forced into that situation.

Jarrah: Yeah. Into survival, sex work who didn't choose that.

Grace: Yeah. Yes. I brought this conversation down even further.

Jarrah: There is also trouble counting the population of homeless women because a lot of women make arrangements to couch surf. So, like, if you're couch surfing constantly, you're not counted as homeless because you're not in a shelter, sleeping on the streets because you're trying to avoid some of those situations we talked about sooner, but you don't actually have a home. So, there are troubles with that as well. But overall, like-- [crosstalk]

Grace: I'm also just trying to think about, number wise, in homeless characters and homeless figures that we see on TV, the male to female ratio, we do see a lot more just homeless men in media than women. Is it just me or are other people thinking the same thing there?

Jarrah: I agree.

Grace: So, why is that? is it because we just don't want to show women in that condition or--[crosstalk]

Sue: But I wonder if the societal expectations of women who are supposed to be caretakers, who may or may not have children with them are at least in our current culture, the ones who are more likely to seek out those services and to try to advocate for themselves to go to women's or family shelters when they need help, rather than the ideal, I guess, of a man in our society of being independent and self-sufficient.

Grace: Damn, we've got to get a sociologist on this show one of these days. I swear.

Jarrah: I think that from like a media stereotyping perspective-- I mean, in a social stereotyping perspective, we tend to think of poor women as welfare queens, which is like, there's a stereotype of like a black woman who's abusing welfare. That's definitely a stereotype. She usually isn't portrayed as homeless. It's obviously pretty offensive.

Grace: Incredibly offensive.

Jarrah: But we see in this episode, in the character of Vin, he calls them losers, he sees this as their fault. And I think that in some ways, it is easier for people to blame a single man who is homeless, he must have made a wrong decision. Maybe I'm wrong but anyway. [laughs] So, we don't have a lot of women in the homeless population in the show, but we do have Lee the social worker. There's Dax. There's a random woman at the rich people party, and there is the detective, Preston.

Sue: I feel like there are a couple women in the crowd when actual Bell is killed.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I think you're probably right.

Sue: But yeah, with speaking parts, I don't think there are really any more.

Grace: So, this really also could just be chalked up to the number of male parts versus female-speaking roles that we have in any given TV show at any given time.

Jarrah: I actually thought the balance was pretty good. I just thought it was interesting to note where the women were placed compared to the men.

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: And we know-- like, we have an explanation for Dax versus Sisko and Bashir. Any comments on the stuff that happens on the Defiant? We briefly said it was adorable, but. [laughs]

Grace: Yeah, we get to see O'Brien and Kira being cute and trying to blend in in various time periods. It's just a cute little romp on the side.

Michelle: Kira's so delightfully awkward. "I broke my nose." [laughs]

Grace: I know. It's very cute.

Sue: I also love their outfits.

[laughter]

Grace: I love that those are their “those will fit in any century” look.

Sue: I'll wear this weird red fishnet top. [laughs]

Grace: I'm going to wear a couple of weird coats at once [laughter] blending in instantly. I also love how they didn't have another human on board the ship and they didn't have really anyone? Nobody?

Jarrah: They're like, “This episode is too expensive. Odo, you're the transporter chief.”

[laughter]

Grace: Yeah. Exactly.

Jarrah: Whatever. It's cute. [laughs] It also is a little weird that you're like let's send the whole senior staff to Earth because nothing could possibly go wrong on *Deep Space Nine*.

Grace: Who is watching station.

Sue: Jake's in charge.

Grace: Yeah, Jake and Nog are just in a single control panel.

Sue: Trying to get rid of those self-stealing stem bolts.

Jarrah: Yeah, and they never do explain if they got the Grand Nagus' nephew back. Actually yeah, that scene with Quark seemed like literally like they just needed to fulfill Armin Shimerman's contract or something because it had no purpose.

Grace: Guys, this episode's real dark. Put Quark in there somewhere, anywhere.

Jarrah: Yeah, but it was like right at the beginning.

Sue: Wasn't this still at the time where like everybody in the opening credits had to have at least one scene in the episode?

Jarrah: Maybe, but Cirroc Lofton wasn't in it.

Sue: Oh, good call.

Jarrah: But yeah, Becky's comment on Facebook was great. “Pair of episodes. An epitomy of Star Trek. It's about something deals with issues and themes while still telling a good story. That moment Sisko and Bashir realized the guy who just got killed is Gabriel Bell is a great ‘Uh-oh. Now, we're in real trouble’ twist to the story.”

Grace: Oh, yeah.

Jarrah: “Several characters get a chance to shine. Jadzia is great with how she adapts and positively thrives in the situation she's literally been dropped into. Some interesting team ups

of characters too. Some of which we don't see often together, like Sisko and Bashir, but they work really well together. And Kira's 'I broke my nose' is far more hilarious than it has any right to be."

Grace: She just is so adorable and pitiful when she says it.

Jarrah: It looks like they're in-- They say they're in the 1920s then or something. So, these people come out of a speakeasy, and she's just like, "I broke my nose." And we're like, that is not the most conspicuous thing about you right now.

[laughter]

Grace: And I just love it when they meet up with the hippies. And the hippies are just like, "Oh, check these guys out."

Jarrah: And then, they see their transport and they're like, "Whoa." You're like, "Thank goodness--"

Grace: Oh, my gosh, can we backtrack for half a second because I just thought of something?

Jarrah: Yeah.

Grace: Why didn't we get a scene of Jake looking through a history textbook seeing Sisko there and just being like "Dad"?

Jarrah: That would have been great. Yeah. Because Sisko's all like, "Oh, I'm going to be in trouble with Starfleet." But that would have actually been great if he was like--

Grace: You got some explaining to do to your son, dude. Your son's going to be traumatized in history class.

Jarrah: Are there any other parts that you feel like we haven't fully covered?

Grace: I'm glad that this is just generally a positively reviewed episode, and it seems like everyone I talk to who has seen this episode gets something out of it one way or another.

Jarrah: Yeah. I often recommend this to people I know who are just getting into *Star Trek* because it doesn't really require that you know anything about any of the characters.

Grace: You get the gist of everyone pretty early off the bat.

Jarrah: Yeah. And it is a pretty classic episode in terms of it's presenting a situation about our society. It's not obviously direct allegory, because it's like, this is actually what could happen if we don't change. And then, a message about but things will, they can and will get better.

Sue: Another thing I think they do really well is the relationship specifically between Bashir and Sisko in this episode because Sisko is familiar with the situation, he knows what's going on. And at least at the start, Bashir is a little bit clueless. And even with his comments on the situation, is sort of put in the place of having privilege. Like, what's going on here? I don't understand this. But throughout this story, he is listening to Sisko and he's not trying to correct him and he's asking questions, and he essentially is behaving like an ally should in a situation like this. And he's learning and he's understanding.

And I think they do a really good job with that character of showing how important it is to listen to people who are struggling and to listen to their concerns and to pay attention to what's going on around you, even if it doesn't necessarily affect you directly.

Grace: I do like how we never see a point where Bashir or Sisko is like, "But we're better than these people, right? These people messed up. These people are sick." They're all just like, "Okay, all these people need help. All of these people are deserving of help, and we are with them."

Jarrah: He never even says, "We're better in terms of the way we treat people," because he says, like, "How are we any different than the Cardassians or the Romulans? And if we were in a crisis, would we just act this way again?"

Grace: Mm-hmm. They're both incredibly humble, and I think that's really important to see in an episode.

Sue: Like, right from the start, they're like, "This is one of the mistakes in our history."

Jarrah: Yeah, I think it really works. It's like, Sisko has a lot of exposition, but it doesn't feel drawn out or boring or anything. It's like, it fits well and it's cool to see him be a history buff. And Bashir's just like, "I ignored this part because it was too depressing."

Grace: And also, if you're going to have anyone give a ton of exposition, it might as well be Avery Brooks. He could read the phone book and it would sound interesting.

Jarrah: I also think that, you know the part where he is mediating the fight between BC and the guard, and he's hauling them off in different rooms and he slams the guard against a wall and is telling him to, "Just shut up because I'm trying to keep you alive," that part is in character for Gabriel Bell. But you can also see how Sisko would do that after no sleep and barely any food and being in this incredibly stressful situation. Yeah, it's cool. I think Avery Brooks does a really good job and so does Alexander Siddig.

Michelle: I do love watching Sisko direct the movement, subtly take control. Move it away from violence. "Let's kill all the hostages and escape by ourselves to--" "No, let's use this for a greater good."

Grace: We'd like to think that ambassadorial skills would be part of your Starfleet training. Just knowing how to handle a crisis and knowing how to calm down.

Sue: Just in case you ever get sent back in time and have to take the place of a riot leader.

Grace: Yeah, there's just in case class there.

Sue: Here's how to handle that situation. [laughs]

Grace: But I mean, crisis control and management for if you're in the command.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. I also really like how everyone in this episode is complicated, including BC, who is the guy who's stabs Gabriel Bell to death. And yet, he's not held up as the guy who shows you the wrong way to do things in terms of, that's not the only way that he's used.

Grace: No, we're shown that he's a guy who's just trying to get his. Not in the best way, but he's trying to get his.

Jarrah: Yeah, he's a bully, he's violent. He's trying to survive by using might instead of through ethics and rational debate because when you're starving--

Michelle: Yeah. His last little scene at the end where he puts the fedora on Webb's son humanizes him and makes him a little less terrible.

Jarrah: Yeah, yeah. And even the part, where he says what his real name is, I think that's really important. And actually, Gene Roddenberry, he was not around when this came out, but he had said previously in interviews that it was important to always understand where someone was coming from, even if they were violent, even if they were a terrorist, that you had to understand what they were fighting for, the reasons for fighting. And without that, you couldn't achieve peace and you couldn't enable people to find nonviolent solutions. If you dehumanize people, even who commit atrocious acts, it becomes difficult to resolve the situation with anything but more violence.

Michelle: Yeah, BC says, "If you treat people like animals, you're going to get bit."

Jarrah: Yeah.

Grace: Yeah. I think that's one of the best ways to handle a story about any social ill, is one where there's no one who is really a bad guy. Just people in bad situations who are stuck in a bad system. And I think this episode really does adhere to that sort of classic *Star Trek* philosophy and type of storytelling of, as humans, we have a lot to learn from and as such, a long way to go still.

Jarrah: So, shall we go to final thoughts?

Grace: Yeah.

Jarrah: So, final thoughts. Let's start with Sue.

Sue: I would call this episode essential *DS9*. I don't think there's any doubt about it. I think it is probably in my top 10, if not top 5 of this series. And it's so well done, as Grace was saying it is. It inhabits the ideals of *Star Trek*, of making us look at ourselves. And I think it has only gotten more important since its original airing. Just taking a look around us today, I think it's an excellent episode. It's not a feel-good episode, but it is an absolutely excellent episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, for sure. Michelle?

Michelle: *Past Tense* is definitely one of my favorites too, if not just of *Deep Space Nine*, of *Star Trek*. Basically, I mean, there's so much to unpack in this episode. There's a lot that we didn't touch on even now, but there's a lot with race, class. Just so much you can talk about, including mental health. And it's even more relevant today than it used to be. Like, somehow this episode knew the importance of social media and the internet and people getting their messages out and showing the rest of the world what's really happening. So, I think that's a really good message too.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely, Grace?

Grace: I think again, this episode holds up incredibly well as a moral tale without just beating you over the head with it. It slides you into the issues so perfectly. It is such a great showcase piece for some of the *Star Trek* actors and it feels like a very important episode. It just feels like one of those episodes where if I could get someone to watch through my picks of *Star Trek* episodes, this is always going to be on the list. It just feels important with its call

to action and with its incredibly well-done storytelling. And I definitely give it five weird future hairdos out of five weird future hairdos.

Jarrah: Oh, right, we forgot to do our ratings. Well, Grace just did her rating.

Grace: Five George Washington hairdos out of five George Washington hairdos.

Jarrah: [laughs] Amazing. I will give this episode a rating of five fake broken noses. Oh, no. [laughter] Five fake broken noses. [laughs] That doesn't adequately express how I feel about this episode. It was like the least depressing thing about this episode I could think of. [laughs] How about five flowers from a hippie on a street?

[laughter]

Grace: Yeah.

Michelle: That was going to be mine.

Jarrah: It could be both of yours.

Sue: Well, I'm going to set my phasers and set my phasers to personal introspection.

Jarrah: Yeah, exactly. This always makes me think about taking a more active role in making like the Star Trekified society that we want. [laughs]

Grace: How do we get closer to that? Rethink how you think about the people you see on the screen.

Sue: And if you'd like to support, especially women's shelters, what they need more than anything else are feminine hygiene products.

Jarrah: Word. Yeah.

Grace: And if you want to just support all the homeless-- [crosstalk]

Sue: FYI.

Grace: - socks and dental hygiene products are always needed.

Jarrah: There are a lot of ways that we can help people, and those are both great points. Same as if you're giving food to the food bank. Things like proteins like canned fish and beans are generally lacking. People just get a lot of mac and cheese. And people also need better nutrition. So, yeah.

Sue: This might be too specific, but in general, homeless women prefer pads to tampons because they're more easy to change in not a bathroom.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Good call. And you know, I would say, I'm not going to say do or don't vote for any specific candidate, but I think people need to get out and vote and they need to make an effort to ask their candidates what their positions are on these types of issues to make responsible and informed decisions.

Sue: Hear, hear.

Michelle: Amen.

Grace: [unintelligible 00:58:13]

Jarrah: [laughs] [unintelligible 00:58:21] for president. [laughs] It was great talking about *Past Tense* with you all today, but this is just one of the many topics being discussed on the Trek.fm network recently. So, here's a quick look at some of the other things you may have missed elsewhere on Trek.fm.

[Trek.fm promo]

Jarrah: We also want to let you know about the Trek.fm Patreon. Trek.fm is a listener-supported network. You can help us keep the *Star Trek* discussion coming by pledging a donation at patreon.com/trekfm. Every little bit helps keep Women at Warp and the other Trek.fm podcasts up and running. So, once you're done with the show, again, please consider hopping over to patreon.com/trekfm.

So, thank you so much for joining us today, Michelle. Where can people find you elsewhere on the Internet?

Michelle: I'm a contributor over at treknews.net. You can find some of my writing there or you can find me on Twitter. My handle is [@mtoven](https://twitter.com/mtoven).

Jarrah: Awesome. And how about you Sue?

Sue: You can find me over on Twitter [@spaltor](https://twitter.com/spaltor) or more podcasts from me over at anomalypodcast.com.

Jarrah: And Grace?

Grace: You can find me on Twitter [@bonecrusherjenk](https://twitter.com/bonecrusherjenk). You can read my writing on the Mythcreants blog and on my freshly minted *Star Trek*-based Tumblr page. You can find me going on and on and on and on and on about more *Star Trek* at graceheartstartrek.tumblr.

Jarrah: Awesome. And you can find me on Tumblr as well at trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com or on Twitter [@jarrahpenguin](https://twitter.com/jarrahpenguin). If you'd like to reach our entire crew, you can email us at crew@womenatwarp.com. We're also on Twitter [@womenatwrap](https://twitter.com/womenatwrap) and on Facebook [@womenatwarp](https://www.facebook.com/womenatwarp). And you can leave us an iTunes review if you're feeling so inclined. It's helpful for more people to get eyes on our podcast and to let us know what you think. So, thanks again for listening and have a great rest of your day or night.

[Transcript provided by [SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription](#)]