

Women at Warp Episode 28: Her Name Means Freedom

introductory music: audio of Uhura singing in Charlie X

ANDI:

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 is Andi and thanks for tuning in. Today we have Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Yoo-hoo-rah!

ANDI:

laughs And Grace.

GRACE:

Hey everybody.

ANDI:

And we have a special guest today: Angélique!

ANGELIQUE:

Hi! I'm Angélique Roche, a contributor for Black Girl Nerds, and a huge fan of the most amazing Star Trek character ever: Uhura. *all cheer*

ANDI:

Yeeah! So today we're going to be talking about Uhura, which is *awesome*. Before we get into that we want to remind everyone about our Patreon. You can support us by going to Patreon.com/womenatwarp, doing a small monthly donation. It really helps us do a lot of cool things including going to cons, upgrade equipment, you know cool stuff. So feel free to go do that. And *pause* Yay! Go Patreon. But today we're going to be talking about Uhura, basically the original Badass of the galaxy and I'm excited to talk about her. I thought we could maybe start with everybody's first impressions of the character, and kind of our feelings about her overall. And then we could start going into some of her important original series episodes. Angélique, since you're our guest would you like to start?

ANGELIQUE:

Absolutely. So a little known fact about me, I started watching Star Trek with my mom. Who watched it when she was a kid, and she kind of handed down this big image of Uhura to me before I even saw that show. And so before I got the chance to think that she was kind of a rock star, I *already* thought she was a rock star and so just this really smart, intelligent, "I know hundreds of languages", you know, critical to every single mission woman who was also *the* woman of color on the show. It was just like really key to being able to see this different unique character on TV, because she was one of a kind at the time. Like I don't think anyone can dispute that she was the first. Just really influential in giving a great image to women of color, but also just over the years still kind of went up the ladder too. So my first impression of her is just like "How can I do that? How can- How can I make that happen in my life? And also how can I look that good in a short skirt and a pair of black suits?"

GRACE:

Years of dance training apparently.

ANDI:

Years and years. Yeah, I mean I had a similar reaction to her, although I started just a few years ago so I first saw her in like 2014 or something. So I didn't have that background, but I do remember the first time I really noticed her was when she has the singing scene, that we'll talk about more, with Spock and I was like "Nichelle Nichols might be the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. She makes everyone around her look like garbage." And that *laughs* kind of like just went on from there. I just was really impressed with how beautiful and competent she was, and just radiant really.

GRACE:

Well for me my first introduction to Uhura was seeing her just as part of the cast. That image of the entire crew gathered on the bridge and Uhura being the one that really, her and Sulu, being the ones that really stood out to me like "Wow! There's a little bit of everyone in this crew! How cool is that?" It was just that kind of iconic image of "Oh these are these people who go into space and everyone is welcome here." And she always just had that- before I even knew her as a character she always just visually spoke of that nature of unity. And I always honestly saw that as "Well I guess that's why people like Star Trek, because everyone's welcome there." And then I started actually watching the show and just being enamored with her excellence. And the fact that she is just the *bridge boss*. *others laugh* Lets face it.

JARRAH:

Yeah when I first started, or became aware of her, I was a kid watching TNG and my dad had grown up on the original series and you know we got some episodes on VHS and so I had kind of a random smattering of episodes and I honestly took Uhura very much for granted, because I was like a 10-year-old kid who didn't know anything about really like the history or how big of a deal Uhura was. And so to me she came across as a cool character who is very dignified and poised and intelligent. But I didn't totally recognize her significance beyond that. And I probably would have been one of the people who agreed with the comment that, you know, at times she felt like a glorified telephone operator because I didn't see that her presence there was so much more than that. And so you know upon watching more and having seen more of her key scenes and heard about her influence as a role model and how much she had to fight for every line that she had, I've been more and more just in awe of how amazing she is.

GRACE:

She's one of those characters who you like her more the more you find out about her.

ANDI:

Yes. And I think she's one of those characters that you associate very heavily with the actress as well. *noises of agreement* I feel like- well and Nichelle Nichols had a lot to do with how Uhura actually played out, much like how Leonard Nimoy came up with moments for Spock that became iconic and kind of informed Vulcan development. Nichelle Nichols was also very heavily involved in character moments for Uhura that she felt very strongly about. So I feel like we would- if there had been a different actress, I don't feel like it would have been quite the same and I don't feel like it would have been as much of an impact if we hadn't had such a strong woman behind the scenes as well.

ANGELIQUE:

And it's really interesting to me, especially about what you just said about the- and that's such a key part to her story that when you watch it for the first time you never really think about it. Particularly when I was a little girl. I never would have thought she was a glorified telephone operator, but I can see where an experienced actress who was really serious about her craft could get so frustrated. And you never really know like, how much you're influencing the rest of the conversation going on, and how much of an impact she had. Because she's kind of in this microcosm right? She's in this little bubble of "I'm fighting as an actress for the things I'm doing." But you know, I don't know what the world would have been if she wouldn't have stayed on the show and she wouldn't

have been as strong as she was and had *shown up*, is what a lot of my friends would say, as a real person and a real human through her character fighting for those moments. You know?

GRACE:

Nichelle Nichols truly is the patron saint of patient headstrong TV actresses. *crew chuckles*

ANDI:

Absolutely.

GRACE:

Make a votive candle for *that*.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And I just want to clarify that- so that actually is a quote from her from an interview about how she felt about the character, and we'll talk more about why she wanted to leave and ended up not leaving. But you know, because all of her other lines kept getting cut so she said you know she was really tired of just sitting there and saying "Hailing frequencies open" all the time. But that she also had quotes where she really recognized how important even just being there was. So in a Starlog interview in 1992 she said "Uhura represented womanhood and the breakthrough of cross-racial representation. She represented dignity and intelligence and no one can take that away from her or me."

ANDI:

Yeah, and I mean part of the reason that she was so frustrated is because Gene Roddenberry and DC Fontana were trying to write stuff for her. So they would have drafts where she and Chapel and even Rand would have heavier and more interesting parts and more lines and she would see that and then the final draft would come out after all the notes, and after you know NBC getting involved, and she would just see her parts pared down to "Hailing frequencies open" and it's got to be especially frustrating to think "I can see what this character could be and I even see how hard they're trying to make it that we still can't quite make it work."

ANGELIQUE:

Well, I think that speaks, obviously I don't think anybody is very surprised when I say this, I think it really again speaks to the fact that it was 1966. Like the country is dealing with a lot at this point. You're dealing with representation but you're also dealing with a lot of really concrete and ingrained stereotypes about what women of color and women, in general let's be very real, women in general on TV are supposed to be. And it's a really unique thing that, who knows? Like if she hadn't been as headstrong as she was. If Gene Roddenberry hadn't fought as much as he did and Fontana hadn't pushed as much as they did. Who knows what the image of women would be on TV? Because you wouldn't have had Mae Jemison looking at Uhura on TV going "I can do that! I can totally do that! I can be in space! That's what I'm going to do!" And now there's a real-life example of a woman of color in space and it's just really interesting in that, and I've said this to folks before because I am a hardcore feminist I work for a woman's organization and one of the questions I got asked when I said I was going to be on the show was "Well why was she always prancing around a short skirt? And you know looking feminine, you know, in the twenty-third century. Why is this happening?" Well, it was one of the first times in history where women of color were *allowed* to be sexy on TV as well, which was a really strong statement in that it marked a change. It marked something that Nichelle was actually comfortable with and I think was absolutely wonderful in just seeing how many different stereotypes she broke.

JARRAH:

Yeah absolutely. I know we're not going to get really into the movies, but Uhura in the JJ -verse has been criticized for having a lot of focus on her relationship with Spock and certainly I think it's fair to critique the reduction to that. But a lot of people pointed out that Uhura in the original series didn't get to even really have

love in that way. And so there were still these restrictions, but I think you're right about you know the appearance issue. She said in an interview in 1987 with Starlog "The quality of Uhura's character was such that you could admire her on the one hand as a woman of strength, courage, and compassion. And yet she was a *female* female. I mean she had legs, and boobs, and high cheekbones, and a little waistline, and different hairdos. I don't think she's diminished by a short skirt, boots, and jade earrings."

ANDI:

And if you haven't read it, I would recommend people tracking down Nichelle Nichols's autobiography *Beyond Uhura* because it's a great read. She actually talks about how she understands why people might have a problem with the miniskirt, but she herself in the context of the 60s to her the miniskirt was a symbol of sexual liberation and she embraced it. So although I think there can be legitimate problems with having you know the miniskirt on the bridge and sometimes visually I think that there are problems with it. I can understand how the context of the 60s adds a lot to the history of what the miniskirt meant on Star Trek.

ANGELIQUE:

Absolutely. And just for the record, I kind of love the fact that in the movies Uhura has a relationship. And you're absolutely right, she finally had an opportunity. But I also I'm kind of a fan of Spock Uhura. I think it's the two smartest people on the ship. It's pretty amazing.

GRACE:

Power couple.

ANDI:

We'll definitely be talking Spock and Uhura because rewatching some of these episodes for Uhura moments made me realize how much chemistry they had, and how much I wish it had been explored a little more. Yes, so that's kind of a background of Uhura in general, but when we were thinking about Uhura episodes and we put out a call for people on our Facebook to tell us what their favorite moments were. That's when we realized, and I mean *I knew* this but it becomes really clear that unfortunately, she didn't have an episode. She didn't have an episode in the original series that really centered around her as the main character. But she *does* have a lot of episodes where she has amazing *moments*. So we're going to go through some of them and talk about what we like and maybe stuff that could have and done better, and just our feelings about it. So the first one that came up for me was in *The Man Trap*. So this is early, and I want to start here because of Spock and Uhura. Spock and Uhura have a really beautiful scene in this episode where they have kind of flirtatious moment. It's a really cool scene and I love the lines. It's like "Tell me how your planet Vulcan looks on a lazy evening when the moon is full." "Vulcan has no moon Miss Uhura." "I'm *not surprised* at all Mr. Spock." It's just this lovely her being so romantic and him being so logical and like, how that could conflict but also how kind of it's so nice to see them interacting together.

GRACE:

How much they play off each other.

ANDI:

Exactly, yeah. It was also produced later, so even though the *Man Trap* actually ended up being one of the very first episodes aired, it was produced later so they actually did get a joke in there about how Uhura's so sick of saying "Hailing frequencies open." I mean it was produced, I want to see 7th or 8th somewhere in the production order. So like already by not even halfway through the first season she was already bored of saying "Hailing frequencies open."

ANGELIQUE:

Yeah. The relationship between Spock and her I think in that show was really great. One of the other things- I think another thing to point out here and we go back to the conversation about Uhura never really having this opportunity to have love on the ship. It's also how they kind of blended *that* into the show a little bit on this one?

ANDI:

Yes, so just as an aside in case people don't remember this episode, this is the one with what I like to call the salt monster. But we do get to see like- I mean we have the kind of traditional "all the men see the woman that they think is the most beautiful" but we do get to see Uhura get some fun times with a good looking man.

ANGELIQUE:

Yeah, he was like- I remember seeing that episode for the first time and I was like *high pitched* "Oh. Hi! Were you speaking Swahili?" *all laugh* It is a really unique moment I think in all of Star Trek though because even- like it is a big deal for Uhura but it's also like a big deal for a woman who is a character on Star Trek to be falling for someone is not a member of like- who is. I mean yes for all intents and purposes the salt monster is pretending to be a member of the crew but it was like this new person being introduced and there was flirting! That was directed at a woman, that wasn't it Kirk! Kind of awesome. *all laugh*

GRACE:

Everybody gets to flirt now! *all laugh*

ANDI:

Not to mention, this is one of the instances that we see Swahili being used, which I think is really cool. Uhura has a background in Swahili. She speaks Swahili in a couple episodes. Her name is from Swahili, both her names. So I mean it's the first time we really get to see that play out. And I think it's really cool.

ANGELIQUE:

I also think it's really cool that it's an actual sentence, that actually makes sense in Swahili. It's not just words thrown together, which actually shows some really good intention in the character development I think. Particularly- and I always go back and you mentioned that Uhura's name means freedom. Which is also again going back to the importance of her character, but then also the respect in a time and age where people like "You need to speak English." But it is like "No, we're going to speak this language because she's a linguist. That's what she does. She knows other languages and we think she's an important character *enough* to speak a language that's not English to her."

JARRAH:

And she is proud of her history. And there's, you know, there's another episode where we see her quarters and we see sort of like little touches of her culture.

ANGELIQUE:

Right.

ANDI:

The next one we have is Charlie X, which we've talked about Charlie X before because D.C. Fontana wrote it and it has one of Uhura's most iconic moments, I'd say, which is her singing with Spock on his Vulcan harp. Which was originally Fontana's idea, but Gene Roddenberry actually added the song and he actually had to fight for it because the network people were like "This isn't a space musical. We can't have music."

GRACE:

This week it is!

ANDI:

And he was like "Come on man! They're in the recreation room, like soldiers sing." And he was you know like going back to his time in the service. He was like "when we had our time just hanging around somebody would pull out a guitar. Let's do that!" So he actually got to keep it in, and I just absolutely love the scene and I love everybody in it including Rand and Spock. There's a lot of nonverbal communication going on that's really beautiful. Uhura gets to wink. I like her wink.

ANGELIQUE:

Uhura gets to smile a lot, let's be real. That's probably the most you ever see Uhura smile In those three years. Like in that one scene she's playful, she's happy, she's relaxed, she looks completely unchained, and she is just doing her thing. You just don't get a lot of opportunities for any of the characters to be playful, but in particular to get that much airtime and to be playful and flirtatious. And again the chemistry between Spock and Uhura was just *all the things*.

ANDI:

I love the way he like at first is a little bit annoyed, but then he almost gives her like a challenging look like "Hey I'm going to start playing. Are you going to join in with me?" And kind of give her-

GRACE:

He gives her an "Oh this is how we're doing it."

ANDI:

"OK, let's see if you can keep up." *crew laughs*

GRACE:

"Oh, that's how you want to play. OK."

ANDI:

And then Uhura doing like throwing back a drink, winking at Rand, and then just busting into this song that's like so sensual. I love it. It's so good. I can't believe we almost lost it. I mean it's one of those things that, on our show and in general we have a tendency to talk about how we wish things are better. It could have been way *worse*. NBC didn't want that scene in here.

GRACE:

Thank God we got *this*.

ANDI:

Yeah. It's good to know that they won some of the battles and we ended up getting some of this awesome material that really stands the test of time.

ANGELIQUE:

Another crazy thing is like, you also go "Man, Nichelle Nichols is really really talented!" Like what are the other things that were possibly worked into the scripts that were knocked out, that she didn't get a chance to do. Like, just that one part as like, you never would have known she had a beautiful voice.

GRACE:

You wouldn't have known she could dance either. She's just a- we get to see her as a triple threat and it's awesome.

ANDI:

Yeah. We have the Naked Time on here as well. The Naked Time is just an overall great episode but the reason that it's on our list is basically for a single line and it's one of my favorites. It's one of the cleverest lines, when Sulu is all hopped up and he grabs Uhura and says "I'll protect you fair maiden!" and she's just got so much spirit, "Sorry. Neither." *all laugh* It's so clever. That is a Gene Roddenberry line that, again, he had to fight for.

GRACE:

No kidding. It's one of those "if you blink you'll miss it" But it's just great. Like the first time I saw this episode I had to rewind and be like "Wait what? Did she just say what I think she said? Holy crap she did!" It's great.

ANDI:

Yeah I mean if you actually look up that quote online you will- there are message boards with people who didn't get the joke. *crew laughs*

ANGELIQUE:

How do you not-? I don't understand.

GRACE:

Poor bastards.

ANDI:

I mean like, maybe if you saw it when you were a kid? And also I think the- and this is why I think it's so clever. The use of the word fair, because I feel like at this point we start to use the word fair in this context to just mean beautiful. But what it actually means is-

GRACE:

Which is racially biased also.

ANGELIQUE:

Yep. That's exactly what it was. Yes.

ANDI:

So I think there are some people who didn't get the *Maiden* part of it, but I think more people didn't get the fair part of it. "Sorry. Neither. I'm not pale and I'm not a maid." and I just think it's such a clever play on words and actually very subversive. It just- even thinking back to it, it makes me laugh and her delivery is so perfect.

GRACE:

So catty, it's fantastic. It's definitely one of those ones if you're watching a group that's the point where you have to be like *yelling off mic* "Everybody shut up! She's about to say the line!" *Andi laughs*

ANGELIQUE:

Agreed. Maybe they were just distracted because Sulu had his shirt off then. I dunno.

GRACE:

It is pretty distracting.

ANDI:

I mean he was oiled up.

ANGELIQUE:

I mean, he *is* pretty distracting as a young man. Not even gonna-

GRACE:

Let's just establish that it's a great scene all across the board

ANDI:

You're absolutely right. Yeah.

ANGELIQUE:

Total fan.

ANDI:

There's a reason why when I think of The Naked Time the first thing I think of is an oiled George Takei and a sword. *all laugh* I just like how big it is. I mean he didn't- *crew laughs intensely* That's not what I meant.

JARRAH:

But also like in this episode they originally had written him brandishing a samurai sword and thinking he was a samurai and he was like "Actually I'm really interested in fencing. So how about we make me Errol Flynn?" and I'm very glad they went in that direction and it rocked.

GRACE:

I think part of the conversation as I remember it is they said "Yeah but Sulu is Japanese." and he was like "Yeah but I'm American."

ANGELIQUE:

Speaking of Sulu can we talk about Mirror Mirror? Can we just have that moment?

ANDI:

Ok, Mirror Mirror.

ANGELIQUE:

It is literally one of my favorite episodes ever. Because as we've been talking about Uhura like standing out as one of the smarter people in the crew, this is kind of where she does.

GRACE:

You also get to see her stand out as one of the most ripped.

ANGELIQUE:

Oh! It's incredible! I've seen the episode a billion times. I literally have sat at work when I need to like feel really good about my day, and like remember what it's like to be that much of a Rockstar, and just replay that scene over and over and over again.

ANDI:

I believe when I was live-tweeting it Uhura came on screen, and I was like "Nichelle Nichols abs were designed by God." That's basically how I feel about it. I think to me this is her best moment because not only is she like,

she looks great, she's extremely sexy, but at the same time she's also very canny. And I call her double agent Uhura in this where she completely plays Sulu and think about how scary that must have been!

JARRAH:

Absolutely. This was an episode that a lot of our Facebook people brought up. Martina said "I like how the regular Uhura was the best and quickest to adapt to the Mirror Universe. That means she's tough enough to survive in that Shark Tank and smart enough to make everyone believe she is her counterpart. And it's not easy to lie to people who are long used not to trust anyone." And Blair pointed out like you said that "She really plays Sulu without any thought for her own safety." It's really badass.

ANDI:

Yeah I mean, there's a moment before she goes up to the bridge where Kirk says to her "Uhura, I need you to go up to a bridge and take a look at the communication logs." He gets her mission basically and she's like "Yeah okay." And she starts to walk out and then she turns to when she looks at him and she's scared. Why wouldn't she be scared? She's about to walk by herself onto the bridge full of people that are clearly not good people and there's just this moment where he's like "No one else can do this." And she's like "Yes. Right. OK." And she really puts herself in a vulnerable position but handles it so beautifully.

ANGELIQUE:

Yeah. I have a lot of friends who have made the statement that that one episode kind of made Uhura their feminist idol. Just because it's OK to be scared, but like she rises to the occasion so seamlessly.

ANDI:

I love when she pulls the knife on him. It's one of my favorite moments of all time. He's like "You're playing a dangerous game." She's like "So are you. *laughs* Here's my knife!"

ANGELIQUE:

The look on her face.

JARRAH:

One that I wanted to skip ahead to, if you don't mind, is Plato's Stepchildren. Because I know we were talking about the Spock and Uhura tension and initially in Plato's Stepchildren, which of course was famously the first interracial kiss between two fictional characters on TV. That it was originally going to be Uhura and McCoy. And then they switched it to Uhura and Kirk and Spock and Chapel. But even though it got by the network the first run by the time they started filming the network was flipping out. And they suggested that it should be Nimoy who kisses her instead of Shatner and Fred Freiburger who was the new executive producer felt really strongly that it had to be Shatner. He said "The network said 'why can't it be Nimoy who kisses her instead of Shatner?' I said 'for the very reason you *want it* to be. Because he's a Vulcan and it's going to be acceptable to everybody that the black girl is kissed by a Vulcan. I want it to be Shatner. It's got to be him.' And Nichelle Nichols said 'So now I'm pissed on a whole other level, to a whole new degree. Somehow I guess they found it more acceptable for a Vulcan to kiss me, for this alien to kiss this black woman than for two humans with different coloring to be doing the same thing. It was absolutely ridiculous.' And there's a really great more details on the story in These Are The Voyages about how Shatner basically was like 'To hell with the network' and screwed up take after take off the alternate version so that they will be forced to use the kiss.

GRACE:

Like making a weird face at the camera or something?

JARRAH:

Yeah actually, literally crossing his eyes at the camera. *all laugh* So they kept running out of time. So I thought that was interesting on a couple levels because I really like the Uhura Spock relationship as well. But it is interesting that, you know, later on the network was actually just like “We would prefer this than having an interracial human couple kiss.”

GRACE:

Very telling isn't it?

JARRAH:

Yeah, and it was also interesting because Shatner is accused of being one of the people who, you know, got a lot of her earlier lines cut. So it was cool that later on he was standing up against this ridiculousness from the networks.

ANDI:

I agree, but it seems like one of the reasons why he wanted to do it is because he knew it was going to be a big moment.

GRACE:

Yeah. There's no way he couldn't know that.

JARRAH:

Oh for sure.

ANGELIQUE:

Whether he did or he didn't, I think you know he also it's a 50/50 crapshoot right? Like it could have been a huge moment that was the pinnacle and could have changed everything in history and made this big splash or could have been “Dear William Shatner, this is the end of your career. We're going to replace it with Captain Pike. Goodbye.” *laughs* like in that moment.

GRACE:

Imagine that scene with Captain Pike though.

ANGELIQUE:

Oooh. I can, actually. A *younger* Captain Pike. Or it could have been Kirk was like “OK there was a point where things are just ridiculous, like you guys have got to stop. Like this is ridiculous.” Then I hope that's what he said. I hope he got to a point where he was like “This woman is an actress, I've been working with her for a long time at this point. We are with each other a ridiculous amount of time, and I know her, and she's a friend. No matter how vain I may be, or come off to be, there is a point where things become ridiculous.”

ANDI:

I certainly hope so.

GRACE:

Regardless of whether or not it was self-serving, it was still just a *huge freakin deal*. And it's really great that you got to see that on this show.

ANDI:

And he- I mean it wouldn't have worked without him.

ANGELIQUE:
No it wouldn't have.

ANDI:
I do understand why, you know, it kind of would've been cool to have Spock do it just because they had more chemistry I think and more of a relationship. But the other thing to keep in mind is this is the Captain. This is the hero of the story and so it is cool that they had that moment between her and the Captain. I think it adds some weight to it. If we're moving on to the kiss itself, like the episode itself and what it means within the episode, I am disappointed that they had this huge moment and they made it nonconsensual.

GRACE:
Yeah, that does taint the experience.

ANGELIQUE:
There was a big deal about that.

ANDI:
The thing is when you're reading behind the scenes you find out that a lot of the reasons why they were like "It's cool" is because it was non consensual. They were like "They're being forced into it." And I'm like *dubious noise* "OK." I mean that's one of the ways that they managed to get it past everything is because they didn't want to kiss each other. And I just think that's kind of sad.

GRACE:
It really does say something about the network's priorities, again, it really does.

JARRAH:
Yeah, it's really interesting reading- so at the beginning that was the main thing that the network objected to was the fact that there was quote enforced love making. The original script actually had Uhura quote playing toesies with McCoy.*laughs* But-

ANGELIQUE:
Oh my. Wow.

JARRAH:
So they were like "This, you're going to have to get rid of this. There can't be forced sexual contact." and then they said that "Well okay, if you're going to have it it has to be clear that there are not racial overtones to the dilemma." So at that point they were like "We're okay with this but you can't imply that race is a reason that they're being forced into it." But then clearly more suits saw the script and started to flip out.

ANGELIQUE:
I mean you gotta make the people in the south happy and again, look at the time frame. That was a big deal. It was unfortunately still appalling to some and in some places still not legal.

JARRAH:
Yeah. And NBC refused to spend any money on promoting the episode so Fred Freiburger was like taking ads out from his own money to promote it.

ANDI:
Fred Freiburger gets a bad rap but it does seem like he was trying. And I don't think the problems of the third season can be laid at his feet.

JARRAH:

Yeah I mean, certainly reading the books makes you realize like *everything* was complicated. Like Shatner's role, Roddenberry's role, Freiburger's role, everything in both the gender and the racial depictions.

ANGELIQUE:

There is probably- I mean I even won't even say probably, there was a lot of compromises. Like even to get things on air. I mean everybody I think knows that this was not meant to succeed. They thought it was going to fail and it wasn't going to be a hit that it was. But I can only imagine being a fly in the room where you are making compromises in order to get deeper meaning and messaging into these shows, and to blend in the social justice stuff that they really wanted to get displayed. Going through that gauntlet must have been extremely frustrating.

ANDI:

And exhausting.

GRACE:

Yeah, no kidding.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Another story I found interesting was in *And The Children Shall Lead*, which is the one where the children turn evil and kill their parents.

ANDI:

which is what I'm Jarrah's least favorite episodes of all time. *laughs*

JARRAH:

I think it's a lot of people's. *all laugh* And that's one where a big problem I had with it was that like, they basically show people their fears and Uhura's fear seems to be that she's getting really old and she looks in the mirror and she sees herself as an old woman.

GRACE:

hysterically The worst possible thing if you're a woman! *Angelique laughs*

JARRAH:

Roddenberry actually wrote a memo to Freiburger saying "Should Uhura's last two speeches be directed towards mirrors, it's ugly. Or towards her shocking belief that she is now dying of old age." Basically he said "I want to protect the character Uhura, and not make it appear to the audience that she is so vain that simply seeing herself as ugly would unduly unnerve her. If she's a well-disciplined crewman, it certainly might shake her up a bit, but she'd continue to do her job." So I thought that was kind of cool and it did end up that they put changes in the script to make her state clearly that "what I'm afraid of is seeing my own painful death."

GRACE:

Better than "Oh God! There's bags under my eyes! *crew laughs* Dear God in heaven! Nooo!"

ANGELIQUE:

Which may I say, Nichelle Nichols has really aged quite gracefully and well and looks *nothing* like the picture in that episode.

GRACE:

The one thing I always love about seeing actors aged up on TV being able to compare them with how they actually age up in real life.

ANDI:

Picard is a good example of that. They have that episode, it's The Inner Light I think, where they show him as old. Patrick Stewart *all laugh* looks like the same age. He doesn't age. It's really freaky.

ANGELIQUE:

He signed a contract with somebody somewhere. *all laugh*

GRACE:

And we don't just mean Paramount.*all laugh* Well *tomato tomato* really. My favorite example will always be Michael J Fox in Back To The Future Part 2. *Angelique 'ohhh's* He just got finer as he aged. *laughter* I stand by that statement. I really do. You know what.

ANGELIQUE:

You know what? Everybody's got their something. *Grace laughs*

JARRAH:

I feel like there are a couple other good moments to mention, but one of the ones that people cited as their least favorite moment was her mind wiping in The Changeling-

ANDI:

Because it makes no sense! Yes. So the changeling. There are good things in this episode. I think some of the themes are good but *laughs* how are you going to have- how are you going to have someone supposedly like wiped? Like they make it seem like her hard drive was wiped basically. "Oh she couldn't do a first-grade reader! It's all cool."

JARRAH:

Yeah, Dylan on our Facebook said "When Nomad wipes her mind, ruined the episode for me. Had to head-canon it to her knowledge of the English language being all that got wiped."

ANDI:

Yeah and actually that makes more sense than what they have in the episode, because she still remembers Swahili when she's learning English. So I mean that would make way more sense. But that's not how they present it. It's weird because the episode itself, like within the continuity of the episode it doesn't make sense. But seriously though, like even David Gerrold made fun of this. Like there is In These Are The Voyages there's a whole memo that he had about how silly this was. He's like "the terribly loose end forces her to relearn everything, but fortunately she did so within a week and was back at her post in time for the next episode." So even at the time they knew there were problems. I'm not sure why they didn't fix it either.

GRACE:

Well either that means she's way more competent than we already thought she was

ANGELIQUE:

Word!

GRACE:
Or Starfleet has really really lax standards.

ANGELIQUE:
We don't know how high her I.Q. is!

GRACE:
She's got more cognitive skills than a Tribble has got back hairs.*all laugh* I don't know.

ANGELIQUE:
laughs I'm sorry. I'm just trying to figure out how you find the back of a Tribble. Oh god.

GRACE:
It's all back. It's *all* back! There's nothing but back hair! That's their secret!

ANGELIQUE:
Really good conditioner.

GRACE:
It's their sweat actually. They sweat conditioner. *laughs*

ANDI:
laughs The one good thing though is that we do get to see Chapel and Uhura together which is nice and rare. I wish they had given them something to do that was other than Chapel teaching her English again. But it does mean that you know we actually have a Bechdel-Wallace pass. *weak yays*

GRACE:
Better than nothing. Again, I guess.

ANDI:
I also- when she is about to- when she gets wiped and Nomad calls her a unit and says she's a defective unit.

ANGELIQUE:
That description blow- *noise of discomfort*

ANDI:
Yeah I mean, it's really *noise of discomfort*

ANGELIQUE:
That whole description of her was just like "Oh! So *this* is how you think of women. Great!"

ANDI:
A "mass of conflicting impulses."

ANGELIQUE:
But then the crew agrees with that?! Like *what*?

ANDI:

Yeah I don't really think- there's a couple of ways you could, I guess, you could interpret how Spock reacts. His line is "That unit is a woman" and *stammers* I can see how you could read it both like not great and then also like "How dare you. She's not a unit."

ANGELIQUE:

That's all I want to read. The latter- I want to feel like Spock is that character that was like "I am going to stick up for the fact that you have just called her an inanimate object."

GRACE:

Which is pretty damn nasty.

ANDI:

Yeah but I don't think that it's- part of it is just that Leonard Nimoy as Spock is always going to be, naturally, the emotions aren't going to be large. There's some interpretation that you can do there. I would like to throw my vote for he is angry. And of course he doesn't think Uhura is a unit of conflicting impulses. But just in general to have that line and have it be about the chaotic thinking of the unit and stuff be about a woman just leaves a bad taste.

ANGELIQUE:

Really it's painful. It's really, I mean it's one of those moments where you go "Did you *compromise* or did you *write this*?"

ANDI:

Yeah. So that was definitely the one that came out as people's least favorite. One of mine is Who Mourns For Adonais and the episode in general, I'm not a huge fan of. But there is a moment where Uhura is underneath the console fixing it. And I've always really loved it because I remember the first time I watched it and I was tweeting and I was like "She's under this console, she's got gorgeous cat eye makeup on, and she's like science-ing furiously" and Spock is like 'Yeah you're the only person that could do this. Continue.' And it's just such a great moment of like, Uhura is good at her job.

GRACE:

She is competent as hell. And it's awesome.

ANDI:

Yeah! And just her being so competent and Spock so explicitly saying how much he trusts her to do this is really helpful for me. And one of my favorite moments between them, one of our Facebook comments on it was "It was one of the scenes that gave me a tiny shove toward becoming what and who I really wanted to be." And that's from Marina and I have to agree I mean, it's just a lovely moment to see her worth as a crew member be celebrated in that way by Spock of all people.

ANGELIQUE:

But it was also like, his whole being is about logic so he wouldn't just say something to *say it*.

ANDI:

Exactly. And that's one of the reasons why when Spock has problematic lines it bothers me so much more, because he's supposed to be our authority on logical. It just- the source means so much in some of these cases. So when he is making it seem like logically women are inferior, that makes me so much more upset than when Kirk is a little bit gross.

GRACE:

Yeah, It gives it an extra sting.

ANDI:

Yeah but in this scene he's lovely and they're lovely together.

JARRAH:

One of the things I'm interested in how you folks feel about is The Savage Curtain, which honestly is I think a terrible episode. But there is the scene at the beginning where Lincoln comes on the bridge and he calls her a "charming negress" and then apologizes "Oh forgive me my dear, I know that in my time some use that term as a description of property." And Uhura says-

GRACE:

Then why did you use it, dude?

JARRAH:

laughs He apologizes and then Uhura says "But why should I object to that term Sir? You see in our century we've learned not to fear words." I'm interested in what people felt about that.

ANGELIQUE:

So this scene, for me, is probably one of the biggest social justice scenes *for her* that really touches home to what's going on. It's one of those moments where *pause* I thought it was *risque*. It is really *risque* at that point in time in what was happening in the country for you to use the word *negress*, which was so close to another word. And when people are getting fire hosed and attacked by dogs and tear-gassed for her to be able to say something so strong as "You are conditioned to be who you are, but your words do nothing to me because I am stronger than those words" is a really strong statement. Particularly when slurs and words are being thrown every day and people are still disappearing and all the other things that are happening in the country at that time. Like, I can see myself being- seeing that for the first time on TV and being filled with the whole inspiration of "You're right. Words can't hurt me. And I'm going to continue being who I am because that word doesn't define who I am." And I think in my case it took a lot of guts to do that scene. And she's right. The words of Lincoln, and what is in all of Lincoln's writings and all of his speeches are clearly not words that we use now *laughs* in 2016 and weren't words that people should have been using in the 1960s.

ANDI:

Again, I think there's a couple of ways you can take this. And one of them is you've just articulated so beautifully in that we want to get to a place where hurtful words no longer hold us back. For me it's a little more mixed in that I feel like that kind of sentiment can be twisted. So like you have on the one hand the very positive interpretation that you just articulated and then I also see this argument though from people who just don't want to deal with it. So they're like "Stop being so sensitive." basically. "See, Uhura didn't mind." You know what I mean? And I really really want to get to a place where those words don't have the power to hurt people.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I think about is really the key point is about *pause* well, I think that the sentiment was definitely you know a statement of power that "I'm not going to let this hurt me" that it can be twisted and that you can choose to ignore the onus on the other side to be more respectful. And I definitely I don't- like I saw this quote brought up a few times when I was objecting to people making really racist homophobic comments on photos of George Takei on the StarTrek.com Facebook page. So I just think it's important to kind of unpack the sentence and to talk about like "The reason we're not afraid of these words is also the words don't have power anymore."

ANDI:

You know actually when I'm listening to you talk about it Jarrah, you know what this makes me think of? The way that racists will use Martin Luther King Jr..

JARRAH:

Oh god.

ANGELIQUE:

Oh god.

ANDI:

You know they'll take some of his speeches and they'll twist the meaning. I've seen it before but since like post-Ferguson I feel like I see it *even* more. And it's more along the lines of instead of listening to what his actual message was, it's more like "Hey everything's fine and let's not talk about it."

GRACE:

It's more like pedantic *word twisting* really.

JARRAH:

Well, and the other reason that it's not threatening is that she knows that it's not Lincoln's intent to use that word in a hurtful way or an oppressive way. But that isn't always the case. So yeah. Anyway I just think they're interesting.

ANGELIQUE:

Just to chime in like closing on that, It's also Lincoln. The man wrote the Emancipation Proclamation. *laughs* I think again I think we've talked about this in the choice of character that's being used. If anyone else had said that on the show, if it wasn't Abraham Lincoln, it would be also a whole other question.

ANDI:

Yeah, the context is very important. Plus I mean, I don't think this episode is great but I will never ever ever forget spitting out my wine when Lincoln suddenly appeared in the sky. *all laugh* Call in like "Hey Enterprise, what's up? How you livin?"

JARRAH:

And then spitting out your wind again room Lincoln gets killed with a spear in the back. *everyone laughs*

GRACE:

This is the magic of television everyone!

ANDI:

I was just like- I was like "What is happening to me right now?!"

GRACE:

I think you mean "What happened to the world when that episode aired?"

ANGELIQUE:

I'm sorry. All I could think of was a trident in Anchorman *all laugh* right now. I'm so sorry. Like I know-

GRACE:

"I think I killed a man with a trident"

ANDI:

It does make me think of Anchorman when they had that big brawl scene so when he comes in it's like "Is that a trident?" "That really escalated quickly." *all laugh* Well we can kind of go back to Martin Luther King. We can start talking about the actual impact that Uhura had, her as a character. So by now people have probably heard the story but I still think it's important to talk about, so Nichelle Nichols was considering leaving the show because she was so frustrated with her part being cut so much and she wanted to go back to Broadway. And she met Martin Luther King Jr. and he talked her out of it which is just such an amazing story.

GRACE:

Just that statement right there of "Oh yeah, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. came and talked this woman out of leaving a TV show."

ANDI:

Yeah it's mind-blowing really.

ANGELIQUE:

Yeah yeah. I don't know what I would've done. I'm glad she eventually was able to talk.

ANDI:

Yeah, I know. It's like can you imagine this like giant of a person being like "Oh I like your show." I don't know how I would react to that. *Cry*. But I mean the reason he wanted her to stay is because he wanted her to understand what her role on TV was doing for people of color and women. And I just think that's really lovely that we had one of these great civil rights activists understanding how much representation matters. Even back in 1967 or whatever that was.

ANGELIQUE:

The funny thing is people don't know like, I keep saying how much it is for women of color. But it wasn't just women of color, like she was a *person* of color on the show period. That didn't randomly disappear or was a salt monster *all laugh* and-

GRACE:

Not a salt monster. Put it on your resume.

ANGELIQUE:

Nah! You were *definitely* not the salt monster! But you know it also speaks to just understanding what people don't realize that imagery and representation. And I kind of hit on this a couple of times, it's like imagery and representation are so important but it's not just that she was there, but it was that she created this image of what a future could look like. And I love this about Gene Roddenberry's content period, so just as a caveat, is that the future projection of a utopian society where people of all races, creeds, backgrounds, and species are together on one ship brilliantly navigating the stars and going boldly where no *person* has gone before. And you know- and I don't know if you guys have ever thought of this concept but I wrote a piece very widely shared that talked about the fact that people of color do not exist in the future. Like there are literal movies from the 60s, the 50s and the 60s, there is *not one* person of color in the future. The world ends and there's no people of color. And it's like "Do we make it? Do we not make it?" I'm not sure. But the new head Uhura and it was like "Oh wait! We're there! Cool! We're going to make it."

GRACE:

The show that changed the future.

ANGELIQUE:

Literally!

ANDI:

I *do* love the way you put that. Like, represented in the future and how much that means. Like that spirit of hope for all of us that as bad as things might be or as bad as things might get that somewhere down the line the human race will get their act together and solve some of these problems that are holding us back. And not only are we going to solve them, but once we solve them we're going to go to space. And we're going to do amazing things once we finally get rid of these problems that have plagued us. That's kind of the message of Star Trek to me and why I love this show so much.

ANGELIQUE:

I couldn't have said that better. It was perfect.

GRACE:

Absolutely.

ANGELIQUE:

But yeah. No, it's really an interesting concept in that people of color just were completely erased in history and the story just hasn't been told. So to see that in the future then, at that time, it must've been like a beacon of hope. I can only imagine.

ANDI:

I think it's particularly tough to find people of color in Sci-fi and fantasy, and that makes me really upset. Sci-fi for obvious reasons that we've kind of touched on already. But like fantasy, the absolute mind-benders of arguments that people will come up with for why you can't have people of color and fantasy is stunning. OK. I was on a Game Of Thrones panel at Dragon Con and *laughs* there was this guy on it, who was talking about how Sansa *needed to* go through what she went through, and Cersei *has to* walk down the streets because those are you know historical precedent. I'm like "OK so where were the dragons? Where were the Dragons in the war of the Roses? Please tell me." You can't cite historical precedent in reality for a fantasy series. If you can find a place in your heart for dragons and you know giant frost monsters, you should also be able to be cool with people of color. So I just find those arguments to be extremely offensive and also so silly. Okay so we talked a lot about Uhura and the original series, but when we asked for favorite moments a lot of people brought up the animated series, actually the episode The Lorelei Signal. Now we did get a chance to talk about it a bit and our matriarchy episode, so if you want to hear us talk more about it there you can. But the reason this came up is because Uhura gets to take command of the ship. Finally! *all cheer* Took way too long. She's fourth in command. Why is she not in command before? We don't know. But at least it happened. Now it happened in the animated series, and it happened because all of the men were incapacitated, but she was still awesome.

GRACE:

The point is that it happened.

JARRAH:

Like, she basically goes to Scottie and she's like "No. You don't have your senses. I'm taking control of the Enterprise." It's great. And like certainly in the other series it never would have made sense for like Geordi or B'Elanna or like Chief O'Brien to come up and like "I'm taking command now because the captain and first officer are out of commission." Like you kind of need your engineer doing engineering.

GRACE:

Can you imagine if Chief O'Brien had done it? It would've been like "Go back to your basement!" *all laugh*

ANDI:

"There's a console down there that has to explode in your face."

GRACE:

"Don't you have to go stand alone for hours on end?"

ANDI:

Yeah. But it is a good episode, and it is a fun one, and it is *amazing* to see Uhura be in charge. And I just wish we had seen it more and I really wish we had seen it in the original series.

ANGELIQUE:

Yeah.

GRACE:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Or anything else anybody wanted to add before we wrap up?

GRACE:

singing to the tune of Rock you like a Hurricane Rock you like an Uhura-cane. *all laugh*

ANDI:

Excellent.

GRACE:

And I'm done.

ANDI:

Good! On that note, thanks so much for listening to our episode about Uhura. But this is just one of the many topics being discussed on Trek.FM. So here's a quick look at some of the other things you may have missed elsewhere on the network.

Interlude

ANDI:

We also wanted 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. That's P A T R E O N dot.com/TrekFM. Every little bit helps keep Women At Warp and the other TrekFM podcasts up and running. So once you're done with the show again please consider hopping over to [Patreon.com/TrekFM](https://patreon.com/TrekFM). Thanks so much for joining us. Where can people find you Angelique?

ANGELIQUE:

Yes, so you can find me on Twitter [@angeliqueroche](https://twitter.com/angeliqueroche). That's A N G E L I Q U E R O C H E. You can find me on Instagram [@a_gelique](https://www.instagram.com/a_gelique). And I am a contributor at Black Girl Nerds. You can find my column Blerdy politics. I also write about Doctor Who every now and then a couple different spots and a couple different podcasts.

ANDI:

Awesome. Grace, where can people find you on the Internet?

GRACE:

People can find me on Twitter @Bonecrusherjenk or they can read my writing on the Mythcreants blog.

ANDI:

And Jarrah?

JARRAH:

You can find me @JarrahPenguin on Twitter, which is J A R R A H -Penguin or Trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com.

ANDI:

And I'm Andi. You can follow me on Twitter @firsttimetrek where I'm livetweeting my first time watching Star Trek. And thanks so much for listening everybody. and Angelique, Thanks so much for coming you are amazing.

ANGELIQUE:

My pleasure. You guys rock.

ANDI:

Thanks everyone.

Outtro music