

## Women at Warp Episode 159: Measuring the Impact of Blackness in Trek

**Female Speaker:** You're listening to a Roddenberry podcast.

[Women at Warp theme]

**Kennedy:** Hello and welcome to Women at Warp, a Roddenberry *Star Trek* Podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Kennedy, and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Aliza.

**Aliza:** Hello. It's me, Aliza Pearl. I don't know why I did that.

**Kennedy:** It's cool. I'm digging it. And we've got two immensely special guests with us. In no particular order, I have Angelique Roché.

**Angelique:** Yo.

**Kennedy:** And Karama Horne.

**Karama:** Karama AKA The Blerd Gurl. What's up? [laughter]

**Kennedy:** As you can tell, folks, this is a hell of a ride. I hope you knew what you were getting in for, for our Black History Month installment. But before we get into our main topic, a little housekeeping that I got to do first.

Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon. We've revamped our Patreon tiers for the new year, bringing in some new rewards like exclusive Women at Warp merch. So, if you've ever thought about checking out our Patreon, now is the perfect time. We really appreciate the support. You can find us at [patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://patreon.com/womenatwarp).

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Just a heads-up, we'll be touching on this over the course of the episode, but at the end of the month, February 27th, we will have a live panel, a live production, a live presentation, if you will, of *Star Trek* into Blackness, my favorite nerdy project that just keeps growing because *Trek* keeps growing. That will be Saturday, February 27th at 07: 00 PM Eastern Time on YouTube and Facebook Live. Check back on the site for more details.

But enough work. Hey, girl. Hi. [laughs]

Thank you so much for joining us, Angelique and Karama. I am beside myself. Those of you who are unaware of our two esteemed guests--

**Angelique:** [laughs] Look, I am steeped in a lot of things, so it's probably quite appropriate.

**Kennedy:** Our esteemed guests, if you follow any type of nerd journalistic endeavors or geek culture coverage, you have seen these two glorious women or you have heard their two glorious voices. And you know you're welcome for collecting this fabulous group of people. I do accept tribute. We can discuss details later. This is always a loaded question, but how are we holding up now, cats and kittens?

**Karama:** I drink heavily. Besides that, I'm good. [laughter]

**Angelique:** Holding up. Mm, ugh, that is such a-- ask me in five minutes, I might have an actual answer. I'm not quite-- I live in California, and everybody read into what that means.

**Aliza:** Yeah, same, same. It's a day-by-day thing for me.

**Angelique:** Yeah.

**Aliza:** Depends on the day.

**Angelique:** Yeah. Or the hour or the afternoon.

**Kennedy:** Well, the best part is we're pushing through like we always do, as we've seen evident not only in our very immediate families, our ancestral survival skills, but also in depictions in the future. And I wanted to take this time to explore the impact of blackness and black culture in everybody's favorite sci-fi conglomerate, *Star Trek*, because it's bigger than a franchise at this point. When your franchise is old enough to start collecting checks, it's a bigger deal.

**Angelique:** Wow. Did you just say that *Star Trek* is on Social Security collecting their checks and they've already gotten to the point where their IRA is paying out and they're not paying in? Is that what we just--

**Kennedy:** We're not quite there.

**Karama:** That was oddly specific. Oddly specific. [laughter]

**Aliza:** I was thinking the same thing.

**Kennedy:** Depending on what type of investments, what their portfolio looked like early on in their career, there was a bit of a lag in the 1970s, but once things picked up with *TNG*, depending on when they retire, obviously, Angelique and I could go in when it comes to--

**Angelique:** I was just going to let Kennedy keep going, y'all. Sorry.

**Kennedy:** Actually, when you take into consideration the exchange rate between latinum and frickin' money-- No, let's not.

**Angelique:** Look, man, some people take that drop, they do that early retirements. You don't know, you don't know what that-- [crosstalk] that life.

**Kennedy:** Yeah. No judgment. [crosstalk] But *Trek* ain't retiring because we've got all these new series. We've got all these new seasons of new series, and it really is the gift that keeps on giving. But I believe, and I have a hunch, that the three of you and those of you listening will agree that one of the greatest gifts of *Trek* that keeps on giving is the cosmic African diaspora. Now, what is the cosmic African diaspora, you might ask?

**Angelique:** I was asking that, Kennedy. Thank you. Yes.

**Kennedy:** It's valid. It's a valid question. Who talks like that? I do. I define the cosmic African diaspora as a concept that includes the nuances of blackness and black culture that transcends race, species, and vast distances in space.

**Karama:** I'm glad you defined it because I thought we were just talking about Sisko's cousins or something. But I'm cool. I got it now. I'm good.

**Angelique:** I was just like-- that was a lot though, Kennedy. How do you even break that apart? Once black people got into space, I'm pretty sure we're like, "Cool, cool, cool. We out."

**Kennedy:** Right. And that happened. But what is cool, I think, about *Star Trek* is that there's representations of blackness across different species. We've seen this in evidence of black Vulcans, black Klingons, black Romulans, and there was even a black Cardassian once upon a time. So, that implies that the presence of blackness transcends not only this planet but also exists on different planets in different ways. If we want to get really super niche about it, when you look at races like the Romulans, if we're all caught up on *Picard*, we know that Romulans can look two different ways. The Northern Romulans have bumpy ass foreheads and the Southern Romulans look like watered-down Vulcans. Those are the same species, but they're two different races. I've seen black actors play both types of those Romulans.

So, that to me is an indicator not only that the casting directors know what the hell is up, but also that blackness can exist on any planet that has a sun and a climate. So, I wanted to not only define that for everyone, but also put that bee in your bonnet, if you will, because it circles back onto some of the representation that we'll get to dive into over the course of this episode. Does that all make sense? Have I broken it down? Are we good? Are we on the same page?

**Aliza:** Yes. And you also kind of blew my mind with the Southern and Northern Romulan thing. I didn't know that. Never saw that. Never realized that.

**Kennedy:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**Karama:** I didn't know there was ever a black actor that played a Cardassian. So, you just blew my mind with that one too.

**Kennedy:** Oh, yeah. It was later on in *Deep Space Nine*. I think it was definitely season 7 if not-- It must have been season 7 because Damar had already defected. So, this guy was supposed to be like the Damar replacement and was super Cardassian. And Weyoun and the Changeling were just like, "Yeah, sure, sure." And scapegoated the hell out of him. But is that because he was a new guy or because he was the black Cardassian? We'll never really know, will we?

**Karama:** Uh-oh.

**Angelique:** Question about this black Cardassian, was he visibly black or just played by a black actor?

**Kennedy:** I will say yes to both of those things because his skin tone was different than the other Cardassians in the room, I imagine, because the makeup layers different, the pigment of the makeup layers different against darker skin. So, the actor was definitely black. I noticed that instantly because his eyes were brown and we don't really see too many dark-eyed Cardassians. They tend to look very snake-like.

**Angelique:** Mm, interesting.

**Kennedy:** But yeah, that was a whole negro dressed up as a Cardassian.

**Karama:** Yeah [laughs]

**Kennedy:** And I saw him and lost my shit because I didn't think that Cardassians could be black. So, that one character, it's killing me that I can't remember the character's name or what even episode it was. I'm sure someone will hit us up in the replies later. But yeah, blew my mind. So, if we can go so far as to suspend disbelief that blackness can exist in all these different species for all these different reasons, to me that implies that there's been a certain influence of the culture upon the people creating the stories.

So, with that being said, if we're looking at how blackness has influenced *Star Trek* itself, the first thing that comes to mind, if we're thinking chronologically, is Uhura. Now, I found this out the other day, it blew my mind. Hopefully, you all will get a kick out of it too. When Nichelle Nichols was auditioning for the part, she had a copy of *Uhuru*, which was written by Robert Ruark in 1962. And the casting directors saw it, including Roddenberry, and they looked up what the word meant and decided that this character was going to be named Uhura. Oh, and by the way, may as well be this fabulously edge-snatching, gloriously beautiful woman who happened to bring this book to my attention in the first place. Because I read some discourse, there was some back and forth about what to actually name the character, and it wasn't until he saw that book.

**Karama:** My dad knew that actually about Uhura and my household growing up, we had very limited types of TV shows we were allowed to watch. I was one of those nerdy kids that never saw *Good Times* as a child because my father was like, "We're not allowed to watch that because we don't do that." And it was very interesting because it was his concept of what we were seeing in the media that he felt that would affect us. I'm not saying he was right or wrong, I'm just saying that was his thinking at the time. But *Star Trek* was one of those things that all the reruns, we were allowed to watch whatever came on. And they really, really-- especially when we found out about Uhura's name, and so that was one of the things he used to say. He's like, "Yes, because that name is Swahili, so you definitely can watch that show." We're like, "Okay, thanks. We're just here for the space, but okay." [laughs]

**Kennedy:** Just here for the blackness in space, but cool. Yeah, I can empathize, Karama. I wasn't allowed to watch most black people things coming up either, for very comparable reasons. So, you are not alone. [laughter]

**Karama:** Yay. I feel seen.

**Kennedy:** So, yeah that blew my mind reading that because I, for some reason, just assumed they-- I don't know what I thought. I guess they workshoped it, I assumed. Who knows these things? But that really kind of blew my mind. And then if we look a little bit further down into the franchise itself, let's look at Picard's support team, AKA black women only. Did you all notice that?

**Aliza:** Yes. Especially after you and I had our Guinan conversation and we talked about this briefly. Guinan, Lily and Raffi, right?

**Kennedy:** Yeah, yeah. He listens to admirals and those three and that's it.

**Angelique:** I didn't think about that, but yes. You know what it was. It took me a minute to see when he was really going to listen to Raffi because I was having issues with Raffi when I first met her, but you are correct.

**Kennedy:** Well, you can't just leave that. We'll circle back to see what your issues with Raffi are, because I'm pretty sure we're on the same page with that one. But, yeah, eventually, had to listen to her. He dragged her along, got her ass fired. He may as well listen to what the hell she got to say, right?

**Angelique:** Which I find odd, but yes.

**Kennedy:** So, it's clearly something that is a theme. I'm not quite sure how I feel about the fact that Picard's support team is only black women. It's one of those visibility issues. Like, is this the only thing you see us as? You realize that we're complex individuals that can't always be there to rescue you? It's a thing, but it's a recurring theme as well. So, I felt the need to note it. But speaking about, I think it was you, Karama, that mentioned it earlier, the Siskos and them. Avery and them in space, like, just the impact of *Deep Space Nine* in general, but also the Sisko's and what Avery Brooks insisted on being represented in this series. I mean, [unintelligible 00:13:38] Goth in space.

**Karama:** No, absolutely. And also, we have to acknowledge the fact that-- I acknowledge the fact that they did a much better-- *DS9* did a much better job with Jake Sisko than anybody ever did with Wesley Crusher. And I can't help but think that Avery Brooks had something to do with that.

**Kennedy:** Yeah, yeah. I remember speaking with Cirroc and he's mentioned how important mentorship was to Avery Brooks on set, not only in that father-son role, but also as an experienced actor and a young actor capacity. So, he was very hands-on in making sure that Jake was substantial, even if he was really-- It's just a little side character there. But you think about the Siskos, you think about the strong representation of black fatherhood, I mean, jambalaya in space. And the fact that he made sure that both of his wives were portrayed by black actors is important too, because a lot of times, we get erased when it comes to being a spouse and that was impactful to me.

And then to round that out, and I'm sure there's things in between and I'm curious to hear what you all think. Michael motherfucking Burnham. Excuse me, I apologize. Captain.

**Angelique:** Yes.

**Kennedy:** Michael motherfucking Burnham. Okay. Homegirl went from surviving trauma at a very young age and then being traumatized again by those Vulcans. Good heavens, the poor thing. [laughs] And then, went from scapegoat to savior in under four seasons. And the amount of people that are pissed off on the heels of that just makes it so much more delicious in my humble opinion.

**Angelique:** [laughs]

**Kennedy:** But please, I'm curious to hear what you all think about what parts of the culture have influenced *Trek* as a whole or in specific instances, if you can think of anything.

**Aliza:** Well, I know we're going to touch on this later, but I wanted to talk about-- Before we talk about the real-world implications, I want to talk about the scientists. There are lots and lots of formulative black scientists that *Star Trek* put forth. So, like Richard Daystrom in *The Original Series* was established as THE best scientist in Starfleet. He's the one who designed the computers that all of the ships ran on. Black man played by a black actor.

**Kennedy:** William Marshall.

**Aliza:** Yes, William Marshall. So, there's that. And also speaking of Lily, she was an aeronautical engineer played by Alfre Woodard. Oh, the developer of the molecular transporter.

**Kennedy:** Yeah. Dr. Erickson.

**Aliza:** Yes. Emory Erickson, played by Bill Cobbs, and that was in *Star Trek: Enterprise*, so he had an episode with Captain Jonathan Archer. So, yeah, there were some really amazing representation for scientists, black scientists in *Star Trek*. And as we know, these types of things definitely have a ripple effect in the world where people watch *Star Trek* and then grow up wanting to be scientists because of it.

**Karama:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Kennedy:** Yeah. That's a real thing. I'm glad that you mentioned Dr. Daystrom, because we have-- I'm posting those blogs this month for all the ancillary characters and the one for Dr. Daystrom posted today, as we're recording, you'll hear this later and hopefully you'll have read it by the time you listen to this. And someone already hopped in the comments and was like, "Yeah, but he was a homicidal asshole." And I'm like, "First of all, show me where you're perfect."

**Karama:** [laughs]

**Kennedy:** That's what I thought. [laughs] Secondly, clearly, you didn't read, because a bitch definitely covered that. Have a seat. Don't come over here talking about my uncle, even if he is fictional.

**Karama:** Yeah. I don't even understand why anybody ever tries to test Kennedy on her *Star Trek* knowledge. I don't understand. Have you met her?

**Aliza:** Like, goodness gracious.

**Karama:** Why would you do that?

**Kennedy:** Girl, I don't know. I just let him. Whose child is this? I don't even know.

**Angelique:** You guys are kind of laying it out right now. For me, I think it was always the subtext characters for me. It was never the big characters for me that made me feel like, "Oh, there's blackness in space." Mainly because I never wanted to think, "Oh, that's the first one. All right, the second one. Cool, cool, cool." And then there was only one. So, it was always really interesting for me seeing just the random side characters pop up or, like, the kids playing around. So, seeing that kind of reflected like even when they got to dock or when they were back in San Francisco or they were at the academy, it was always the group shot for me, that made me feel like, "Oh, here we are. Oh, we exist."

**Kennedy:** We made it.

**Angelique:** Cool, cool, cool.

**Aliza:** We're not just tokens.

**Angelique:** Well, and that's it. And I think it's one of those things where I know the folks that are-- all of us on the show right now have been the first or the only in a room. And I think it has always been so much more impactful for me because I love Uhura. Look, we don't even have to start talking about how many times that I've sat on a panel and been the only OG *Star Trek*. Everybody else was talking about *Voyager*. And no offense to *Voyager*, but I'm like, I'm breaking down the Uhura paradigm. The fact that lines were left on the floor, the fact that she was not allowed to shine as a dancer and a singer for most of the show. You know what I'm saying? I own an Uhura comic book, that's my heart.

But it wasn't really impactful to me until we got to the movies and there were-- You had that rare glimpse of a family or that rare glimpse of-- There's just a smattering of us and not just, "Oh, Uhura's on the bridge. Cool, cool, cool." Or even for me, honestly, there's one particular episode, and I'm blanking right now, where there is a shapeshifter that is on the ship in *The Original Series*.

**Kennedy:** Oh, *The Man Trap*.

**Angelique:** *The Man Trap*.

**Kennedy:** I just looked up this.

**Angelique:** Thank you, thank you. And one thing that stood out to me is that they didn't asexualize Uhura. They gave us a gorgeous, gorgeous brown-skinned man on the ship, where she starts speaking Swahili. There's this one particular scene-- Are you sure it's *The Man Trap*, Kennedy? Is it *The Man Trap*?

**Kennedy:** Yes, because I literally just checked because I thought that the character that you're referencing was a crew member.

**Angelique:** No, yeah.

**Kennedy:** Come to find it out was a changeling and he was bouncing-

**Angelique:** It's a changeling.

**Kennedy:** -around from person to person trying to entice them and stuff. And when it saw her, it changed its appearance to be this beautiful, beautiful man-

**Angelique:** Gorgeous.

**Kennedy:** -and just starts rapping to her in Swahili. She was like, "Sir?"

**Angelique:** Right. Hi, who are you? [laughter] And I thought that for me, as a person who has studied television from its inception in the 1950s when black folks first got lead character names and like *Beulah* and *Amos 'n Andy* and the stereotypes and the tropes that were just so layered on and to have this like one rare moment, this insanely fun moment, even though she was clearly in danger. You in danger, girl. I was like, "Yo, but she gets to be sexy. That's dope."

**Kennedy:** And the best thing about that episode is early on in the episode, she was trying to holler at Spock. She was like, "So, what's it like on Vulcan?" And he was like, "It's a planet."

**Angelique:** So, first of all, the only reason I like the Kelvin Universe-

**Kennedy:** Is because of that?

**Angelique:** -Is because-- Yes, yeah. You want to know? No. I will go down. I have sung karaoke dressed as Uhura, talking about her love for Spock. This is how hardcore I am. Uhura and Spock are the smartest two people in that crew. They deserve each other. And all Leonard Nimoy wanted, he's like, "Look, you know what? I get it, Kirk. You're cool. You're a cowboy. That doesn't mean you always get to get the girl." And that is why I like the Kelvin-- everything else that people got problems with fine, have your problems. But I truly always wanted Spock to end up with Uhura, and I got it. So, yeah, yeah. No.

**Kennedy:** Winner, winner, chicken dinner.

**Angelique:** Winner, winner, chicken dinner. Live your best life, Leonard Nimoy. Live it.

**Karama:** Uhura was absolutely also my favorite character, because I don't remember when-- I feel like I was in college before I figured this out, but the day that I realized that Uhura was the original universal translator, just stopped me in my tracks, because people forget, and they don't-- I feel like that came out in what we were just talking about, the Kelvin Universe JJ Abrams version. But people just would just forget that Uhura had the ability to speak every language, not just in the country she was from, but in several galaxies and multiple dialects.

And inadvertently, she was the quintessential black woman who is basically always in the back of the room, listening, knowing what's going on, but nobody ever pays attention to the fact that she's there. So, Uhura became my role model because of that, because you can't get away, I think, from-- I would love to get away from it, but I feel like in my lifetime, I don't think I can get away from being one of the only black women in a room when we're talking about mainstream spaces or pop culture things, just like Angelique was referring to.

But Uhura had that level of, A, like you said, being gorgeous, B, wearing that dress, and, C, not being here for your nonsense, and, like, a woman who can cuss you out in at least a thousand languages? Come on, now. Come on.

**Angelique:** Yeah. Say it.

**Kennedy:** She was something else. I've got to split a tiny hair though. Technically, Ensign Hoshi Sato was the first universal translator. But to be fair, [unintelligible 0:24:11] didn't really go too far out. As much as Hoshi might have built that database, I'm pretty sure a lot of that failed by the time Uhura was dealing with Klingons and shit.

**Karama:** Okay, no, no, no. You know more than me. You know more than me in that, so I will defer to your expertise. But growing up, that's what I thought, and that meant so much.

**Kennedy:** Yeah, and growing up, technically, you weren't wrong. Because canonically, Hoshi hadn't stepped onto the scene yet.

**Angelique:** It's all right. It's all right, Karama, she's talking about the one version of *Star Trek* that many of us haven't watched.

**Kennedy:** [laughs] Listen, it's still there if you ever want the opportunity.

**Angelique:** Yeah, I hear you. I hear it, I respect it, and I acknowledge it. And I get that it's canon, but that doesn't mean I have to like it.

**Karama:** Oh, my goodness.

**Kennedy:** You don't have to like it, but you need to know your history. Because, listen, it's been a long road, [laughter] okay, getting here. And not for nothing, Scott Bakula in that flight suit, just saying.

**Angelique:** Look, I have a lot of respect for Scott Bakula as a person, as an actor, as a mentor from the stories that I've heard from folk. He has been-

**Karama:** Quantum Leap.

**Angelique:** Quantum Leap. That's all I got to say. But [unintelligible 0:25:28] y'all just I have a lot of opinions, I have a lot of feelings when it comes to *Enterprise*, and they're just not going to change. And you're talking to somebody who literally lost their whole loving shit when they saw Pike pop up in *Discovery*, whole loving shit. And then, Number One, whole loving shit. You're talking to somebody who has literally watched the pilot more times than probably is damn near necessary. But *Enterprise*, I just have feelings, I has feelings.

**Kennedy:** That's all right.

**Karama:** Bring it back to the Michael Burnham thing though but in terms of *Discovery*, because I was like, "We're going to go down that road."

**Angelique:** Thank you for saving us, Karama. Thank you.

**Kennedy:** I was just going to say I have faith of the heart.

**Karama:** [crosstalk] Because I was like, "They about to fight. They about to fight."

**Kennedy:** No, we not going to fight.

**Angelique:** I was going to agree to disagree. I'm good.

**Kennedy:** It's fine. There's no ill will. Everything's Gucci because NX happened, whether people don't like it or not.

**Angelique:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Karama:** I do want to make a statement about Michael Burnham-- Well, not just Michael Burnham, but *Star Trek: Discovery*. Everybody obviously talks about the fantastic job that Sonequa Martin-Green as Michael Burnham has been doing. And I acknowledge that. I think she's an incredible, incredible actress. But I had a conversation on my podcast with David Ajala, who plays Book. And what I spoke to him, it is very clear that what we have seen, not just in *Discovery*, but also in *Short Treks*, the blackness that we are all-- No, the people of color as a whole that we are seeing throughout *Discovery*, come directly from executive producer and director, Olatunde Osunsanmi.

And then, I got a chance to talk to Olatunde Osunsanmi, and I asked him directly, I'm like, "So, you just out here putting Nigerians in space. That's what you're doing." Because he's Nigerian. David Ajala is Nigerian. Oyin Oladejo plays Joann Owosekun, is also Nigerian. And he was like, "Oh, yeah, you haven't even seen behind the scenes."

Oh, Oh, that whole like the actual crew. Amazing, amazing stuff. And then even he directed *Calypso*, which was the Short Trek that Aldis Hodge was in that, I swear, has everything to do with what we saw this season with what was happening to the onboard computer, but we'll get there. So, I think the lovely thing that we're seeing with *Discovery*, we're just talking about Uhura being the only one in the back of the room is, look how much more beautiful it can get.

**Kennedy:** Blackity--

**Karama:** Right. Yes.

**Kennedy:** Negro, collard greens, injera bread, and maybe some fried chicken with, who knows whatever you like to drink? I'm not going to judge.

**Karama:** No, listen, I'm going to acknowledge the Nigerians in the room, and I'm going to say, [unintelligible 00:28:36] Egusi and Fufu it will get when you have somebody behind the scenes that is like, "You know what? This needs a little bit of color. I'm not asking you. This is just what we're doing."

**Angelique:** I love y'all.

**Karama:** This is what we're doing.

**Angelique:** I'm telling you. It makes a difference, man. It makes a difference.

**Kennedy:** Again, I don't understand why you don't believe me when I said Wakanda forever. [laughter] Not one week, not one year, not even two years. Here we are three years down the line and still going strong. We even have Wakandans in space, okay? Wakanda forever.

**Karama:** Yeah. I'm done with you. [laughs]

**Angelique:** Forever. [laughs]

**Karama:** But wait. But also, I just want to acknowledge that this season, we also saw the first time I have ever seen a black Trill. And they brought sis back twice. I don't know her name.

**Kennedy:** Mm-hmm. And she's not just the black Trill. She's the president of Trill. That's her shit. Not only is that her shit-

**Angelique:** I also love when she was like, "I hear you saying what you want, but mm."

**Karama:** Right. I'm telling you what you're going to get. [laughs]

**Kennedy:** Not only was there her, but also the general of the Earth Defense Force was a black woman. A whole black [unintelligible 0:30:01] at that. She looked at them like, "Mm, a viewscreen. How quaint." I said, "Bitch, did you just read this shit?" [laughter]

**Karama:** They were, "Don't you know who we are?" And she's like, "I represent the planet. So, no?"

**Karama:** You cannot park here. You cannot park here, okay? I'm just letting you go. [laughs]

**Aliza:** Do you not see this "No Loading Zone"?

**Kennedy:** I was like, hold up. How you going to read the ship? We just got here, first of all. Secondly, damn, hi, hello. How are you? [laughs]

**Angelique:** Also, did expect her not to read the ship as soon as they got there-

**Kennedy:** Oh, god. Yo, I lost it.

**Angelique:** -she's a black woman. Yo, she read them as they entered the Milky Way. What are we talking about here?

**Kennedy:** I lost it.

**Angelique:** I mean, they jumped, but y'all know what I mean.

**Kennedy:** It was fabulous.

**Aliza:** Let me not get corrected.

**Kennedy:** It's cool. It's fine. Because they can't beat all of us, you know what I mean? So, it is what it is. But, yeah, so representation in *Discovery*, Aliza, I know this is a tough subject for you, but the representation of blackness in *Lower Decks*, we had multi-generational black women running things.

**Angelique:** Y'all, Dawnn Lewis, but also Dawnn Lewis. Can we just have a moment for Dawnn Lewis? Y'all, Dawnn Lewis is one of the only black women in the guild for theme songs because she co-wrote *A Different World*. Dawnn Lewis, who played Tina Turner's mama on Broadway, Dawnn Lewis.

**Karama:** Wait, I have a question. I need to know why Aliza has an issue with-- What happened?

**Kennedy:** Oh, oh, I don't know you want to. We're going to get into this after this because I want Aliza to have the full scope of the room to express herself, and we can't do this here. This is a monitored frequency.

**Aliza:** That's not what today is for.

**Kennedy:** No, it's not. This is an official Starfleet frequency and they're monitoring this at all times. I don't want to hear any shit from the Admiral anymore, okay? I'm trying to keep it clear. I just got my broadcasting privileges back, okay? Let's not rock the boat just yet. But *Lower Decks*.

**Angelique:** I am a fan of *Lower Decks*, so I really want to have this conversation offline.

**Kennedy:** Ooh, it's lit. It's a dope conversation. Don't get it chopped. I'm just saying.

**Angelique:** Ayy. But I also, I also believe it's not without its problems. I'm sure.

**Kennedy:** I'll just put it this way. Not everything is for group discussion.

**Karama:** Oh, okay. [laughs]

**Kennedy:** But I'll say that however we feel about it, there is not only one, but two black women on *Lower Decks*. And it is the first time we got to see a black woman captain. Sure, there are reservations at the first time we see it.

**Angelique:** Wait, it's not the first time we see a black woman as a captain.

**Kennedy:** On the series as a showrunner? Yeah.

**Aliza:** Like, as the regular--

**Angelique:** I was about to say, "Mmm."

**Aliza:** As one of the main characters.

**Kennedy:** There was Captain La Forge. There was Captain Silva in *Star Trek IV*. That was the first one I saw, was still Madge Sinclair, but I saw her and I said, "Oh, so we really made it out this motherfucker. Okay."

**Karama:** Jamaicans in space. Jamaicans in space. Jamaicans in space.

**Angelique:** Even if it was only five or six minutes.

**Kennedy:** I was okay with that.

**Karama:** We made it.

**Kennedy:** Cool with it.

**Aliza:** Mm-hmm.

**Angelique:** I was ecstatic. I lost my mind the third and fourth time I saw it because I realized how unique it was, because we didn't see it again for a very long time.

**Kennedy:** For almost 30 years. [laughs]

**Karama:** You know what's funny? when we have this conversations about diversity and people ask me, "Well, do we need it? Why is it that important, especially when it's not necessarily the creator's original vision?" And I give them what I call the headphone philosophy. And it's like when you buy a new set of headphones and they sound amazing and you have this crisp, amazing surround sound and everything. And then, you sit there and you go, "How in the world-- What was I listening to before? How did I not know this existed?" So, the world is so much more rich and beautiful and full of sounds and colors that you've never seen before when you start incorporating other people's visions and interpretations of an original story. Also fiction, so get over it. [laughs]

**Angelique:** Right, right, right.

**Aliza:** Tell me how you really feel about it, Karama.

**Kennedy:** [laughs] That was a very Romulan-esque way to [unintelligible 0:34:37]

**Angelique:** She was like if you got a problem, go kick rocks.

**Kennedy:** You can claim all that Klingon shit if you want to, Aliza, [laughter] but I know Romulan shit when I hear it. That was some smooth ass, "Tell them how you really feel, though. But go off. Tell them why you mad."

**Aliza:** But go off, sis. But go off, sis.

**Karama:** And sis said, "You know what? I am. Thank you."

**Kennedy:** And another thing.

**Karama:** I'm just tired of seeing these arguments about why certain things don't work because they don't look like they used to. I don't understand. I don't. I really don't.

**Aliza:** I agree. 100%, I agree.

**Karama:** You can sit here and tell me that a replicator in a movie is clearly broken because it's kicked out the same juice seven times, but I give you two or three women of color, and you actually think that's a problem. Like, what?

**Kennedy:** Well, we all know why. We all know why.

**Angelique:** Oh, well, it's because they've sat there and they've done exactly what most people do. They assimilate a thing that was never really meant to be a certain way, and they put their own beliefs on it, and then they own it. You didn't know that, Kennedy? They own it after that.

**Karama:** I was just going to say racism, but okay, that works too. [laughter]

**Kennedy:** Yeah, yeah, that's what it is.

**Angelique:** No, we're saying the same thing, girl.

**Kennedy:** That's what it is.

**Aliza:** I just added more words. Colonizing, racism, it's about the same thing. Chicken and egg.

**Aliza:** Entitlement. Another word to add to it.

**Kennedy:** Yeah. Let's be specific. Let's label it properly. It's entitlement and it's bigotry. Because racism implies that these people who are viewing it and have opinions are in positions of power to oppress others, and they don't.

**Angelique:** Or that they're nuanced, because I think that's the other thing I was getting at about this ownership. This ownership isn't nuanced. They aren't being-- They think because they're making some kind of "nuanced" argument that has a lot of details in it, that they're being nuanced and they're not. Because if they were really being nuanced, they would realize that the original writers' room was fighting against the network the entire time, and they were being ruled by the advertisers and stuff that was supposed to make it on air didn't because the people who controlled it were institutionalizing racism on the airwave, saying, "It won't sell and our advertisers will pull their dollars."

**Kennedy:** Right. Also, if you're accustomed to your specific experience being the norm, whenever different experiences are introduced, it automatically feels like oppression because you're forced to make room. It's not pie. It's not pie. [unintelligible 00:37:18]

**Angelique:** Did you not see someone who looks like you? Oh.

**Karama:** I have a question for Kennedy that will keep you out your back. Well, maybe not, but-- [laughs]

**Kennedy:** I'm like, "Hey, I was about to say."

**Karama:** The question I've been meaning to ask you and it's so funny that I get to do it on this very podcast, but I know you didn't hop on the *Discovery* train as early as some of us, and I had a question for you about when you did-- Yes--

**Aliza:** For a good reason.

**Karama:** And-- [laughs]

**Kennedy:** Whoa, whoa, no, hold on. I'm going to stop you right there for shitty reasons and here's why. I was one of those "new Trek people" who didn't want anything to do with new

*Star Trek* because it wasn't chronologically sound or whatever the hell. And if y'all had told me that Shazad Latif was on that first and second season, I'd have binge watched that shit.

**Karama:** Oh, no, I wasn't on board because I was like, "So, we're going to send the black woman to prison. Okay, she going to--," because I've-- And then, she going to be a prison and now y'all want her to do-- Because we haven't been oppressed enough? Okay, and you going to blame everything on. She was just trying to warn y'all and now you're going to blame a whole war? Okay.

**Kennedy:** Mm-hmm. Take no responsibility for the fact that Starfleet did not have the appropriate protocol on how to interact with Klingons. You're just going to blame her for doing the right shit because she didn't ask you first. Cool, cool, cool. Tight, tight, tight.

**Angelique:** Right. Because black women.

**Karama:** But that was not what I was going to ask you. I was going to ask you about the Klingons. So, there was all these things that circulated when it first dropped by people who actually had not watched the show, they just saw images that felt that some of the black Klingons were caricatures. I thought they were stunning, but anyway.

**Kennedy:** Gorgeous.

**Aliza:** They were beautiful.

**Karama:** But I thought it was very interesting because I'm watching the show, no, I'm seeing a range of skin tones. And I found it very interesting that the albino Klingon was the one that was the outcast.

**Kennedy:** Mm-hmm.

**Angelique:** Mm-hmm. I didn't find it interesting. I found it liberating.

**Karama:** Well, but here's the thing. And I'm using the word albino, but I don't even think that's the word that was used on the show.

**Kennedy:** I think they did. I think they did use albinism.

**Karama:** Okay. I wanted to ask you your opinion of that part when you did finally see those first two, three episodes and see all of these Klingons. Because I remember people asking me, "What do you think?" and I'm like, "I think Klingons come in all kinds of colors like black people do. I don't understand. Where's the problem? I missed the problem."

**Kennedy:** Yeah. We've already established through Worf and Kurn and their systemic erasure from the Klingon High Council that Klingons can be black. I didn't have a problem with there being so many different complexions. I didn't even have a problem with them looking extra crustacean-y.

**Angelique:** Yeah, the design was a little weird for a moment. It took my brain a second. But also, so was the highly racist original Klingons that look like Mongolians.

**Aliza:** Yeah. I think the *Discovery* Klingons were definitely a step way above *TOS* Klingons in terms of design.

**Kennedy:** So, here's-- When you look at the Klingon chronology-

**Angelique:** There you go.

**Kennedy:** -we remember, those of us who have watched *Enterprise*, that the reason Klingons went from having ridges to not having ridges.

**Angelique:** That's a lot of shade. That was a lot of shade.

**Kennedy:** Just saying.

**Angelique:** It's cold over here and I live in California.

**Karama:** Exactly. I just got a blanket because I got a chill, hell.

**Kennedy:** Klingons went to having no ridges because they took the Augment virus. The same thing that made Khan and them super strong and super smart and stuff. They took that wanting to do the same thing and because it was designed for humans, it took their ridges.

**Angelique:** Huh, they erased the racism by giving a scientific reason.

**Kennedy:** No, they explained the racism by giving it a scientific reason, that's all.

**Karama:** [laughs]

**Kennedy:** It was an explanation, not an excuse. When you think about episodes-- like, what was the one on *Next Generation*, where they all devolved and Troi turned into like a salamander and shit and Worf got all super crustacean-y?

**Alize:** I should know the name of this because we just did that episode about viruses. I forget the name of that episode, but I know what you're talking about.

**Kennedy:** If Worf was a devolved Klingon, if that is a proto-Klingon, if that is their Homo erectus or their Neanderthal, it stands to reason that Klingons would evolve past the Augment virus into something that's extra crustacean-y like that. If that's what they originally looked at before they started to evolve and developing cognitive abilities and brain function and society and fire and shit, then I'm okay with T'Kuvma and them looking the way that they did.

**Karama:** I love how she said T'Kuvma and them. [laughter]

**Kennedy:** That was they. I say Goddamn. [crosstalk] Because you know already know T'Kuvma is invited to the cookout. He was talking about liberation against an oppressive imperialistic system. If that ain't a Marcus Garvey, Fred Hampton in Klingon form, I don't know what is.

**Angelique:** Well, he trusted nary a human.

**Kennedy:** None of them.

**Angelique:** T'Kuvma was not about humans. He was-- yes.

**Kennedy:** And even had the nerve to be, "Here they go. Here they go. Here come their bullshit. Look, look, look."

**Angelique:** Exactly. He was like, "You hear that? You hear that? They on their shit again."

**Kennedy:** Here they come with their bullshit.

**Angelique:** Yep.

**Kennedy:** And can't be mad because he wasn't wrong.

**Angelique:** T'Kuvma was black. We have established T'Kuvma was black.

**Kennedy:** I'm with T'Kuvma.

**Angelique:** Fuck, y'all. Whether or not and I love you, Kennedy. The first time I ever met you were cosplaying as a Klingon and I will never forget it. Well, technically, the first time I met you was in the gym. The first time I met you met you, you were dressed as a Klingon. And I was like "That girl looks familiar. Also, she ride hard for Klingons." [laughter] I respect it.

**Karama:** But I come-- Listen as long as I've known you, I completely agree. But I also think that I had shouted out the actor, Chris Obi, when I saw him because I loved T'Kuvma. And he was like, "How did you recognize me?" I'm like, "Oh, no. I had to look it up." But I was a fan of the actor because he also played Anubis in the first season of *American Gods*. And I just thought he's gorgeous.

**In Unison:** Ah.

**Karama:** And he's gorgeous as it is.

**Kennedy:** Girl, you could tell he was gorgeous underneath all that makeup. I say he fine. I don't know who he is, but I would love one please and thank you.

**Karama:** I will take two. Thank you.

**Kennedy:** Yes. Aliza, what do you think about this? Because I don't know if you all know Aliza has a whole Klingon RPG. She has baking, cooking channels in Klingon. Did you all know?

**Karama:** No, I did not. [laughs]

**Kennedy:** Did you know that gluten is without honor? [laughs]

**Aliza:** Gluten is without honor in this household.

**Kennedy:** True.

**Angelique:** That is the name of this episode, I'm telling you right now. [laughter]

**Kennedy:** We can't. It's already been taken. It's branded content already.

**Aliza:** It's part of my merch. I actually have gluten is without honor on my merch.

**Angelique:** I would like a link in the chat so I can give you my bunnies.

**Karama:** Gluten is without honor. I love it.

**Aliza:** Yes, I will share the link. Yeah, okay. Oh, goodness. What do I think about Klingons and blackness? Or what was the question?

**Kennedy:** In the juxtaposition, the turn, the fact that the lack of melanin is what they were focused on as a Klingon community and not the fact that this man was willing to be the torchbearer.

**Aliza:** Mm-hmm. Well, yeah, I also found it really refreshing in early *Discovery* days to see that, yes, the albino, the light-skinned dude Klingon was the outcast. It was refreshing. The funny thing is it didn't feel like surprising or strange, it just felt cool. And then, I was like, "Oh, because we don't-- This literally is usually not the case. We don't usually see this." So, it felt both familiar and comfortable and also refreshing. And so, yeah, I am a big fan of what *Discovery* has done with Klingons in general. And I think what I want to see-- And okay, let me frame this. Let me take half a step back and frame this because I think it's actually really good for us to take a tiny little deep dive into Klingons.

**Kennedy:** Let's go.

**Aliza:** Yeah. We should because this is *Star Trek* Into Blackness. I love this topic. Let's get into Klingons and blackness. So, here's the thing. We all know that in *TOS*, the introduction of the Klingons, they visually were in brown face. And because of that, there's a whole generation of *Star Trek* fans who grew up associating, and I'm not making this up, I have heard from 50 plus year old white men who are *Star Trek: TOS* fans who were, "Oh, yeah, I always thought the Klingons were black." The Klingons were kind of a stand-in for a black and/or Asian monoculture in space. You can't run away from that truth.

**Karama:** You can't.

**Aliza:** No one here is running away from it. But I know some listeners might be, "No." But listen, y'all, it's true, it was a weird subconscious thing that happened. But a whole generation of Trekkies grew up thinking-- Or trekkers I guess grew up thinking of Klingons as the black people or the Asians in space. So, if you take that and you really dive into what that means, first of all, we see that Klingons, just like with black cultures and black people in the media, Klingons are considered a monoculture and we don't see the depth of diversity within Klingon culture. And *Star Trek* did this with a lot of species.

But with Klingons, it's even more egregious because we saw so much Klingon culture. We have the language, we know about the High Council, we know a lot about Qo'noS, we know a lot about Klingon history and warriors. There's been so many books written about Klingons. And yet, we still have kind of this monoculture idea. But you know what? *Discovery* did not do a monoculture for Klingons. And we already said this, we saw Klingons with different skin tones. We saw Klingons with different jewelry adorning their heads and foreheads, different wardrobe and costumes and cultural costumes. The whole point of season 1 *Discovery* storyline with Klingons was to unite all these different warring factions of Klingons because they were all different cultures. And so, that's why whenever people talk shit about *Discovery* and what they did with Klingons, I'm like, "You need to get over your shit because they are actually diversifying Klingons in a way that we've needed that to happen for so, so long."

**Kennedy:** Agreed.

**Karama:** See, that's fascinating. And I just learned something. Thank you, Aliza. I'm learning so many things. I'm taking all the notes right now.

**Aliza:** My pleasure.

**Aliza:** Kennedy, you have a lot of really great insight on Klingons and blackness too with *DS9*. I feel you and I should team up and do a lecture on Klingons and blackness.

**Karama:** Yes, I will take my money. Yes, I will pay for that TED Talk. I will pay for that TED Talk.

**Kennedy:** I will gladly dust off my Son of Mogh panel to do it again.

**Karama:** Which I have seen and paid for, and it was amazing.

**Kennedy:** Thank you. Primarily because I want to garnish enough interest so that I can get one of these highfalutin, high-profile convention companies to get me on stage with Michael Dorn and Tony Todd. Just saying that, the crowd would give a shit about the Sons of Mogh.

**Karama:** Well, I'm going to put it out there in this year of 2021, in this Black History Month, that now might be the time to put that proposal together, my sister.

**Kennedy:** Yeah, yeah, I'm on it. So, before we get too off track here, because you're right Aliza, there are moments of monochronicity in different species across *Trek*. So, it's incredibly cool to see blackness represented not only in Klingons, but also in the Vulcans, in the Romulans, in that one Cardassian dude. And just validating the fact that not only do black folks, that black humans survive to the future, but black people on other planets make it as well and are contributing members of complex ancient societies that are over, for the most part, their bullshit when it comes to something as superficial as melanin content.

**Aliza:** Yeah.

**Kennedy:** So, it's really neat. I just want to remind everyone that on Saturday, February 27th, you will get to see the live presentation of Star Trek Into Blackness, the panel hit up Women at Warp on all the social medias and stuff for the details forthcoming. That will be a YouTube and Facebook livestream, so stay tuned for the details and it's going to be great. Angelique, where can folks find out more about you on the internet?

**Angelique:** Ah, you can find me on the interwebs at [angeliqueroche.com](http://angeliqueroche.com). Angelique Roche on the Twitters and Angelique Roche official on the Grams. I'm also on TikTok but you don't want that [crosstalk]

**Karama:** Yeah, you do.

**Angelique:** I'm a voyeur, but it's also Angelique Roche official. Karama's right, follow me. I like being validated. Thanks. [laughter]

**Kennedy:** Okay, great. And, Karama, where can folks find you on the internet?

**Karama:** I'm basically [@theblerdgurl](#) everywhere. I'm always on Twitter and Instagram and Tuesday nights from 8:00 PM Eastern to 10:00 PM Eastern. You should check out [@theblerdgurl](#) Live on Twitch on the OS\_OperatingSystem channel.

**Kennedy:** Excellent. And, Aliza, where can folks find you on the interwebs?

**Aliza:** You can find me on Twitter and Instagram, [@alizapearl](#) on Twitch, [@apizaliza](#). And also please keep an eye out on my socials because by the time this airs, I probably would have posted that I'm GMing a private *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* three-shot campaign and it's open to the public. It's not going to be streamed, it's private, but you do have to pay some monies, but it goes to your girl Aliza and it's definitely worth it and Joss Whedon.

**Kennedy:** Hell yeah. On that, I'm Kennedy and you can find me on the internet on Twitter and Instagram both *@thatmikeychick*. Don't act up in my comments though, because I will drag you publicly and block you. Just so you know.

**Karama:** She's not lying.

**Aliza:** You say that so nicely too. I will block you.

**Kennedy:** I will. I will.

**Aliza:** So smooth.

**Kennedy:** I'm just saying, "Hey, listen."

**Aliza:** Kind of want to be blocked by you Kennedy, sounds so sexy [laughter]

**Kennedy:** That's the other Instagram page. I mean, huh? [laughter]

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**Karama:** Stay black. I'm done with you.

[Women at Warp theme]

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