

Women at Warp Episode 169: Colonialism and Imperialism in Star Trek

[Women at Warp Theme]

Jarrah: Hi 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 Jarrah and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Andi.

Andi: Hello.

Jarrah: And we have two amazing guests, Andrea.

Andrea: Hi.

Jarrah: And Dr. Lynette Russell.

Lynette: Hello.

Jarrah: So, before we get into our main topic, which I'm very excited about, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. Today's show topic, which is "Colonialism and Imperialism in *Star Trek*", is a Patreon suggestion from Eve. If you'd like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as a dollar per month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit patreon.com/womenatwarp to find out more and support our show.

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So, I want to start off by asking our guests to introduce themselves and just tell us a bit about how you first got involved with *Star Trek*. And I'll start with Andrea.

Andrea: [unintelligible 00:01:56], Pictou Landing Mi'kmaq. Hi there, I'm Andrea. I am from the Pictou Landing Mi'kmaq Nation in Mi'kma'ki, which is what is currently known as Nova Scotia. And I am recording this from the traditional and unceded lands of the Algonquin Nation. I came to *Trek* in the 80s as a way to bond with my mom watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This was something that we shared together. And I got into the subsequent series of *Star Trek* after *TNG* and actually I met Jarrah doing a CBC panel, a radio panel on *Star Trek: Discovery*. So, that's how I got pulled into this wonderful world of Women at Warp.

Jarrah: And Dr. Russell, or Lynette, if I'm okay to call you that, could I also get you to introduce yourself?

Lynette: Certainly. I'm Lynette Russell. I am a historian. I've studied mostly encounter histories and colonial histories, imperial histories. I am coming to you today from the unceded lands of Naarm, now known as Melbourne, Australia. My connection to *Star Trek* is a lifelong one. I can't actually remember it not being part of my life. It was certainly part of my childhood then in the 70s, endless reruns of the original series. And I can still remember where I was the day, I first saw the very first episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I was in of all places, Guam, doing fieldwork. And a bit like what our previous guest just said,

it was very much something that we did to bond with our mother. She was a big *Star Trek* fan. And then of course, I did the same with my kids. They weren't thrilled about the *Star Trek* pajamas and the occasional *Star Trek* toys, but they've certainly grown up loving *Star Trek* as I did.

Jarrah: That's great. And like Andrea, I am also coming to us today from the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. And I am originally from the unceded territory of the Comox people on the west coast of Canada. So, as mentioned, the topic today is Colonialism and Imperialism in *Star Trek*. And there are two previous episodes that we're going to overlap with today. One of the episodes that we did fairly early on was on indigenous representation in *Star Trek*, and I'm sure we will touch on that today. But if you really want to dive into, for example, Chakotay, you should go take a listen to that episode, because we have a very big topic today. So, those specific examples, we might not get to all of them.

Another one that we did more recently was on ethics of the Prime Directive. And in that episode, we tried to keep some of these pieces a little bit aside for this episode because those topics are very much linked. And we did talk a little bit about the Prime Directive as a doctrine of noninterference. And today, I think we'll get into how that connects to colonialism and imperialism.

So, let's start out by maybe clarifying just some of the terminology and feel free for anyone to jump in if you want to elaborate or add to any of these pieces. But for anyone who might not have the background in what these terms mean, colonialism, it's a practice of domination--according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, it's a practice of domination which involves the subjugation of one people to another. It involves a transfer of population and direct control over political, financial and social arrangements. Imperialism is when a remote government oversees a region without necessarily having a noteworthy settlement.

So, those are kind of the dictionary definitions. But of course, this is heavily underpinned by capitalist and racist ideologies. Both of these systems rely very much on a construction of a racialized other and viewing Western, European American ideals as true and objective. So, I'm sure we're going to get into more of how that fits into *Star Trek* in a moment.

Andi, I think you wanted to add a bit about out how this works, particularly in US history.

Andi: Yeah, one thing that what I think of when I think of this idea of colonialism, imperialism and American history specifically is I always think of what Americans usually get taught in our high school classrooms as manifest destiny. This idea that the settlers were supposed to go westward and civilize all of America, and it was basically there for us to take. And that it was not just something they wanted to do, it's something that they were morally obligated to do. And when I was taught about this in high school, I was lucky in that I had a history teacher who taught us why that was terrible. But I think that a lot of Americans still hold on to this idea without even realizing it.

And it's definitely a part of American exceptionalism and has kind of impact today. An idea that didn't really like many things when it comes to this. It didn't really leave, it just morphed. So, that's what I always think of when I think of this topic and specifically in America.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. And in Canada and other parts of the world, there was also a principle, legal principle, called terra nullius, which is also known as the doctrine of discovery. And it was basically international law that gave license to explorers to claim "vacant land" the name of their sovereign. Vacant was just anything that wasn't occupied by Christians, because the idea is those people were not people or only had the potential to be people worth counting if they became Christians. There was also a refusal to accept land

use patterns as valid form of occupation of the land because it wasn't the kind of property ownership that we saw in Europe. And that, of course, was also super convenient because the Europeans wanted the land.

And this didn't just happen in the Age of Discovery in terms of settling places like the Americas and Australia. But also, we see these same ideologies at play in things like the Crusades, this idea of like a civilizing mission. And similarly, more recently in some of the justifications for military intervention in the Middle East and Afghanistan. This idea that we have an obligation to people that need us to save them.

Andi: And isn't it just so convenient that we have to save these people and they have so many delicious resources? I think that's what it goes back to when you were talking about how this is all underpinned by capitalism. This all really boils down to a lot of- There's a lot of economic opportunity with these sorts of ideas and justifications.

Lynette: Certainly, from the Australian perspective, that doctrine of discovery and terra nullius is not only was it, pervasive and resulted in dispossession and relocation of many people, it actually continues to this day to be thought of by vast numbers of the nonindigenous population as being a legitimate way of thinking. Because there's a constant kind of refrain of, "Well, they didn't invent anything. They didn't build great structures. There were no fences," this kind of stuff, which of course fails to understand the indigenous relationships to land.

Andrea: And it's interesting that you brought up manifest destiny because this whole notion of terra nullius and the doctrine of discovery, like manifest destiny is just that, 2.0. It's terra nullius 2.0.

Andi: Yep.

Andrea: And it always cracks me up a little bit when I heard Americans talking about manifest destiny as being this like, very American ideal. And I'm like, "This is kind of the colonizer playbook everywhere you go. It hasn't really changed like that." Those plays, we've seen the impacts of these all over the world with, like Dr. Russell was saying, the displacement of indigenous peoples and the forced relocation, and the robbing of resources.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I really like the point that you made, Lynette, about the fact that this isn't just a historical thing. I think that we need to really hammer that point home that the impacts of the ideologies persist to this day as well as the impact on a lot of people. And I'm sure we will get to some examples of that, but I think that's another misconception that people have is, this is something but my generation didn't participate in this.

Andi: Yeah, I think that goes back to Andrea's point about manifest destiny basically being the same idea in a different package is, like, these ideas don't go away. They just get renamed and rethought of and recontextualized without actually changing what it is.

Andrea: And there's no critical thinking taught in school systems. There is a little bit more now with the younger generation, but there certainly wasn't when I was coming up. Even in university, this critical thought about how this notion of the doctrine of discovery or manifest destiny, how this colors public policy and the way that we view indigenous peoples and their resources and their impacts on the lands and cultures around them.

Lynette: I think perhaps for me it's best put by Patrick Wolfe who described colonialism as not so much as an event, but a structure.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. All right, so we can return to these pieces but want to start to get into how we see this manifest in *Star Trek*, the *Star Trek: Manifest Destiny*. [Andi laughs] And one of the things I think that is important to note is that, at least in my opinion, *Star Trek*'s origins are pretty inseparable from imperialist ideals we have. Gene Roddenberry pitched *Star Trek* as *Wagon Train* to the stars. *Wagon Train*, as you can imagine being a western show, very much fell into that manifest destiny narrative and the idea that Westward expansion was right and good and that there was a racialized other that was either a threat or fetishized.

Similarly, we know Roddenberry was also super inspired by Horatio Hornblower. And Picard is very much modeled after Horatio Hornblower who is a British naval captain character. And in several of his novels there are stories of discovery and encounters with darker-skinned people that are portrayed in some pretty racist ways. So, even if the intent at the time was maybe a little bit more on the progressive side on racism in the 1960s, that these underpinnings, I think, have made it very hard for *Star Trek* to break free and kind of imagine things in any kind of decolonized way.

Andrea: And I think that what you were saying about, we can't separate the idea of the Federation from imperialism and you absolutely cannot. Because even when you start from like *Original Series* and you move forward, there's been minor adjustments to this American and certainly western worldview of what is right and what is good and we're all going to speak American English and this is going to be the way that everything is and we're the arbiters of what is ethical and what is right. Now, that's something that's always struck me about *Star Trek* and the Federation and getting folks to join this conglomerate of nations and planets, it seems like for me, the Federation is a lot like a Commonwealth.

So, you have the founding nation, which in this example would be Earth. They disproportionately benefit from the resources and the access and whatever else might be profitable or provide a gain to the whole, they disproportionately benefit from that. But other outlying planets or outlying people, they don't get the same benefit from that. It's not a truly egalitarian organization at all. And it's the humans from earth who are calling every single one of the shots right from *Original Series* forward. So, that's something that's always kind of cracked me up about that, that we're this United Colors of Benetton, bringing everybody together. And this is like all very, "Oh, everybody has the same rights, but we only have the same rights when it's convenient. And as soon as it gets difficult, we're going to bend the rules that we've set for ourselves." So, I always found that a little bit counterintuitive to what the intent of the Federation is.

Andi: I think you make a really good point that's worth highlighting even more, which is 9 times out of 10, when we're seeing Federation leadership, it is humans.

Lynette: That's very true.

Jarrah: And then, it's white guys, mostly.

Andi: Yes.

Lynette: It is very true. And it's interesting because we know that the Vulcans, in many ways, the impetus to start this all off, because obviously they connect with humans and that's the point at which we'd have first contact. And from there, we develop the United Federation of Planets. But the reality is it's very heavily human centric, and humans are much more-- They're much more dominant in the space than any other species.

Andi: And to Jarrah's point, it's really heavily dominated by white humans. And not only white humans, but white humans that are American and occasionally British. And it's really only in the last couple of series that we even see that challenged any at all. So, it really is

heavily from one moral perspective, which makes it really troublesome when we go back to Andrea's point about this is supposed to be setting the moral framework for the entire universe, all from one perspective.

Jarrah: And it's supposed to be a utopia. [Andi laughs] It's supposed to be a vision of progress which, I guess, is part of the problem because part of this imperialist, colonialist ideology is this idea that there is one linear model of progress. The idea in *Starfleet* is when you develop warp technology, that's when you become "advanced." And we see some points in *Star Trek* where that's challenged a little bit, but ultimately, it's like technological. There's a benchmark that determines whether you're a primitive culture or an advanced culture. And that's another way that manifests in *Trek*.

Lynette: And I think there's also an interesting component there too. We talked a little about capitalism and the role of capitalism, which clearly in the 1960s, 70s and 80s and ongoing is crucially important. But *Star Trek* absolutely rejects the idea that it is connected to capitalism. So, it tries to decouple capitalism from imperialism or colonialism, quite unsuccessfully, we'd have to say. [laughter] But it's an honorable attempt in lots of ways. The idea that there is a unilineal evolution, it's rife throughout *Star Trek*. That's something that I don't think any of the developers or writers have yet really managed to sort of deconstruct the idea that there is more than one way of being a human or being a being or being advanced. You're quite right. They've connected it far too intimately with technology.

Andrea: And I think that there's a lot-- talking about the capitalism point, it is capitalism, but we're not talking about financials, but there is still trade. There are still things that have value. There's still like, if you come from a nation with dilithium, for example, that's going to improve your standard of life more than it would be if you're agrarian or elsewhere. And in some of the episodes that we're going to explore, there are resources, like we're just making an economy out of something different. But we don't go to the store and buy the necessities of life. So, we're going to tell you that this isn't capitalist, but it truly is.

Lynette: Mm, absolutely.

Andi: Yeah. I think that goes to *Star Trek's* problems throughout the show of being idealistic and telling you that it's feminist, that it's antiracist, all of these things. But then, the writers being steeped in a certain culture and they can't truly conceptualize what a non-capitalist society would even look like. So, it creeps back in because they are limited by their society and it's a completely understandable human thing. Like, you can say that you're trying to portray these ideals, but unless you can truly understand what you would need like world-building wise to show those ideas properly, it's going to just creep in. Like, it's kind of inevitable.

Jarrah: Definitely. And so, this brings me to a question that we talked a bit about on our Prime Directive episode but I wanted to pose it to this group again, which is the Prime Directive and the whole idea of noninterference in the way that it's presented in *Star Trek*, which seems like a conscious, well-intentioned attempt to try to prevent, I guess, the cultural contamination of people that have achieved these advanced levels of technology. And it seems to be rooted in the desire to avoid repeating some pretty crappy periods in Earth history. But does it actually work and does the Federation actually live up to it?

Andrea: I don't think it does.

Andi: Yeah, no and no. All right, cool, we're done. Everybody can go home.

Lynette: I thought there was a really excellent line in your program on the Prime Directive that said that really the Prime Directive is only ever discussed or invoked in order to

essentially be ignored. And I think that's very true. For me, one of the most powerful episodes is *Who Watches the Watchers* where they go to Mintaka. And I mean that's a case of a complete miss, but it's built into a unilineal evolutionary framework so that you can only develop in a certain direction, which is very much a western direction to the point where they even call them-- I think they at one point call them a pre-Bronze Age civilization. I mean they really are just saying they look just like us or like what our past used to look like.

Andrea: But the Prime Directive has always been anchored around technology. And that's the thing that's always bothered me about that, is that it's taking this like very like America-centric view of progress and overlaying that on every single society that they encounter and making a value judgment on this society is in advance. And I'm glad that you brought up the Mintakans because the Mintakans were actually quite advanced socially in a lot of ways.

Lynette: Yeah, absolutely.

Andrea: Like, particularly on the roles of women and how conflict was dealt with and how histories were shared and skills were developed, there was a lot of advancement there that you wouldn't have seen even at the comparable warp kind of development period on Earth. So, it's always struck me as a bit wonky when you have warp drive, as we're going to reach out to you or not, and we can't interfere in your journey to get to warp drive where, like Andi was saying, it's all like, super linear. We have to follow this one direction. So, that part of the Prime Directive has always irked me a bit.

And like Dr. Russell was saying, the Prime Directive falls apart as soon as you put it up against the tiniest bit of scrutiny or the tiniest bit of difficulty. So, whenever there's a complicated thing involved, we see in *Insurrection*, there's the metaphasic radiation that's supposed to have a lot of medical applications and this would be arguably very helpful to Federation planets, and it would be an extremely valuable resource. But as soon as there's something that the Federation wants, the Prime Directive is essentially window dressing that just goes out the door. It's not something that-- if there's something that we really need, then these rules don't apply anymore.

Jarrah: And in that case, I think of *Insurrection*, one of the things that's super interesting is they think that the Ba'ku are "primitive" because they don't see them using technology. And I like that their assumption is challenged on that. Although it still reinforces that, "Oh, no, no, we are advanced because we figured out how to do all the things we just chose not to." So, it still doesn't totally break from that framework, but it does challenge the idea that just because you don't see people flying around in warp ships, they aren't "advanced." But then, yeah, you basically have the whole Starfleet Federation is just agreeing to relocate a population off their planet and destroy the environment of this planet for this pseudo-capitalist gain.

Andi: I also find the Prime Directive, just in concept, to be extremely patronizing. Why do you get to make these decisions? And I find the Federation in general to be extremely patronizing. It's very much like, "We are the arbiters." And it goes back to what we were talking about way in the beginning, that there's like some sort of moral imperative to bring our high-minded ideals to all of these people that are just not advanced enough to understand how amazing we are. That whole vibe is very much there for the Federation in my opinion and with the Prime Directive.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think that one thing I wanted to draw attention to was we see this repeatedly in *The Original Series* where an episode that we didn't focus on in our prep for today, but we talked a lot about in the indigenous representation episode is *The Paradise Syndrome*. But then also in a private little war, this idea of like these "primitive" places as being like Eden

and that we can't go and pollute Eden. But it's patronizing it-- Somehow, you keep encountering these societies that are stuck in time and don't change. And then, this idea is like, "Well, we can't come because we wouldn't be able to stop ourselves from messing it up." But there's no expectation-- It also implies that the learning that will happen is all the learning in this linear progression of the people at the backend to like learn more to get caught up and there's no appreciation that maybe the other people could learn something from these people.

Andrea: No, I think it's a perfect parallel to not be-- It's something that we see right now in current government policy making. And this is happening in the Americas as well as like Australia and New Zealand, where you don't have enough of recognition that traditional knowledge is valuable. That knowledge of the land and the interconnectedness of everything in it is just as valuable when it comes to various policy and regulatory decision making.

Jarrah: Or maybe more valuable.

Lynette: Yeah, more valuable. Certainly, in Australia, our knowledge is becoming increasingly incorporated into land management strategies. Anybody who knows anything about Australia and our horrendous fire seasons knows that we are now really trying to get traditional knowledge back into the management of the land so that we can in fact prevent those gigantic fires. But while you were talking just a moment ago, I started to think about that, I think really awful episode, *The Apple*. Actually, quite hard to rewatch. Not just the technical aspects of it or it looks like the set is literally shaking. But there's something about that particular episode where you know that they're totally ignoring the Prime Directive. But it's entirely justified in terms of, "We're going to make your lives so much better. You're going to be more like us. You're going to find love," for example, "You'll have little people, children. You don't need to know, you'll find out." It's truly bizarre.

But it is again, the Garden of Eden. It's the paradise, despite Chekhov telling him that paradise and the Garden of Eden is just outside Moscow, which is perhaps the only amusing moment in that pretty awful episode. The red skin was what got me. I was trying to work it. And the strange eye makeup.

Andrea: Yeah, I had a really difficult time as well, Lynette, watching *The Apple* and *A Private Little War* only because there were people who were clearly supposed to be indigenous.

Lynette: Yeah, exactly.

Andrea: White actors wearing Oompa-Loompa makeup and really taking on everything that stereotypical and tropey about indigenous mysticism. And you have to like, "Oh, we have medicine women and these witches are going to come and get you." And I just found that was really interesting because when you take-- it kind of shows the bias of the writers at the time. And I think you still see this in modern media. It's not just *The Original Series* that fell prey to this, is that this way of life was so savage and so wrong and if you're not living a happy life by my terms, then I need to bring you along the way. Like, I need to show you what happiness is, and I need to show you what success is. It was just this insane colonial viewpoint on the world that made me scream a little when I was rewatching both of those episodes.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think very tied up in the secular humanism of *Star Trek*, which we've also talked about in our religion episodes, this idea that it's our responsibility to disabuse you of your superstitions.

Lynette: You're quite right. There's many a time when Kirk will say something to the effect of, "We've outgrown your gods," and the like. But there's something-- that's quite radical

when you think about it. That's the 1960s. That's actually extraordinarily radical, particularly from the Americans perspective. Australia's much more of a secular nation and we've always had that kind. We've had at least two prime ministers who have been absolutely avowed atheists, which is not something you would have in, for example, I've ever seen in America. But to think that *Star Trek* in the 1960s was essentially saying, "Well, religion is dead. We don't listen to religion. We've got, in a sense, a new religion, which is technology. We've got a new belief system which is entirely based around our capacity to create these technical advances."

Andi: And then again, they run into the problem that they run into every single time, which is they can't conceptualize having no religion. And so, you see religion throughout *Star Trek*.

Andrea: Exactly, exactly. [Andi laughs] That's the ironic component of it, isn't it?

Jarrah: Yeah. And I think it comes back to, again, the idea that--I guess just that patronizing attitude of that, "This is advanced and this is not advanced." So, I think, yeah, it absolutely was pretty revolutionary for the time but I think from a modern viewpoint has the unfortunate downside of reinforcing that imperialism. And another thing I wanted to mention about that was--

Oh, right, about *The Apple*, that in his book, *Star Trek and History: Race-ing toward a White Future*, Daniel Bernardi has a lot of examples arguing that *Trek* reinforces an idea that evolution and "development" equal whiteness because you often see these societies like you see in *The Apple*, where they're in this orange makeup, but also, you get the code of honor in *TNG* and some of these other societies. And then, all of your omnipotent beings are all white including in *Voyager*, when you see the Q Continuum and they are all white people in two episodes. So, yeah, reinforces that idea that progress also equals assimilation.

So, maybe on another theme, I wanted to ask about the Federation versus the Borg, because this was something that you talked a bit about in your research, Lynette, and the idea of, do you have to actually stick nanoprobes in someone to assimilate them?

Lynette: See, I think the Borg and the Federation are not at all different. I think they're both colonial entities, colonizing entities. I think the Borg is just doing it in a slightly more malevolent manner. It's very difficult when you think that the Federation is out there to bring in every planet and essentially make them just like us, which is precisely what the Borg is doing. They're physically making them just like themselves, and they are absolutely colonizers.

Andrea: I think the difference with the Borg is that they're honest about it. They tell you that they're going to add your technological and biological distinctiveness to their own. Like, they just say, "Yeah, we're colonizing you."

Lynette: That's a brilliant way of putting it. Absolutely. They're actually self-aware. [laughs]

Andrea: Yeah, they're honest. Like, the disclaimer is right there. Whereas the Federation's like, "Oh, we're going to give you all this peace, but by the way, we're only going to do it by the rules that we set out and you need to follow them. We don't care about your traditions before this point."

Andi: I will say in the Federation's defense that at least there's much more of a choice there. Like, you actually have to apply to become a part of the Federation. And we see a couple of episodes, especially in *TNG*, where they're like evaluating people to join. So, there is actually a world where they don't join the Federation, whereas the Borg are pretty not into that. [laughter]

Lynette: Of course, in *Journey's End*, we see a group of Native Americans who choose not to join the Federation, in fact, ally themselves with the Cardassians in order to prevent being essentially assimilated while being moved for a start, but also being colonized or assimilated in the way that the Federation does.

Jarrah: Yeah, we definitely need to talk about *Journey's End* and also the Maquis in general. One point that I just want to raise from *Journey's End*, because Andrea and I watched this a couple weeks ago, was in that episode, they actually basically say to the people who, by the way, fled Earth to find their own world, partly to get away from this shit, and then just find themselves caught up in it all again, and are sort of almost kind of saved by Wesley and another advanced white guy. So, many problems with that. But in that episode, they actually say to the people, "You understand that by staying here, you will give up your citizenship."

Which to me was really fascinating because in most situations that we would have on Earth, even if your territory changed, you would still retain the right to say you could return to Federation space and vote. So, the idea that the Federation was not going to grant them anything, even if they returned, was pretty harsh to me.

Lynette: I thought that was fascinating because they quite literally were saying, "You're on your own." When I rewatched it, I hadn't actually remembered quite just how definite that was. "You will be on your own."

Andrea: Yeah, it reminds me of the inverse of enfranchisement in [audio cut]. So, if you wanted to do anything outside of the prescribed list of activities approved by Indian Affairs, then you had to give up your indigeness. So, when we were watching *Journey's End*, I was thinking about that. I was like, "Oh, this is like the opposite of that," [laughs] in a lot of ways. But in the same sense, yeah, the circumstances are slightly different and the rights are slightly different, but it's still an external party making decisions about your future.

Jarrah: Andi, you wanted to talk about the Maquis.

Andi: I just put them on there because I feel like they were trying to do some indigenous allegory, not even really an allegory because they literally use indigenous people. And I just find it fascinating that this is one of the few times that we see the Federation being challenged in this way and they are not treated completely like villains, but they are definitely treated like antagonists and we are supposed to see them that way. But it's murky at best.

And then also, I just find them interesting because they're one of the few groups that goes across series and show up in *DS9*, show up in *Voyager*, started in *TNG*. And the kinds of characters that end up being in the Maquis I also find interesting because the first one that comes to mind for me is Ro Laren who is already, as a Bajoran, a part of *Star Trek's* exploration of occupied people. So, I feel like the Maquis become very fascinating in that way. And I was really curious as to other people's thoughts on this.

Andrea: It's always grinded my gears that the Maquis were always painted as terrorists because when you see their various portrayals in different episodes throughout the different series, that's always the thing that comes back and reminds me of how indigenous peoples who push back on imperial and colonizer rule are painted the same way. Let's think about the water defenders at Standing Rock or anybody who's pushing back on natural resource development are painted as terrorists. And they're going to be taking something away from a greater whole and they're endangering your safety. They're endangering your good life. So, I always found it interesting that there were so many parallels to how indigenous people are portrayed as antagonizers and dangerous and if you're not subjugated and following these colonial rules, that you're a terrorist.

Lynette: And it's interesting in the *DS9* episode, *The Cause*, where certainly the Maquis are constantly referred to as terrorists and a terrorist organization and destabilizing the Federation. But what I found really interesting is that there's a particular scene where they're heading out into the wilderness, the Badlands, and it's actually the Irish, Miles O'Brien, who starts to question whether or not there's such a bad group of people just perhaps trying to make things better for themselves. And I thought that's a really interesting choice, being Irish and having this clearly meant to be an Irish character. And we know that the Irish have been colonized over and over again. So, that, to me, was an interesting moment of self-reflection.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I think it also makes sense given we know that character has a background with the Cardassians. But I love the exchange where I think it's Bashir in that scene who says something like, "Well, of course, I'm sympathetic but I don't want to excuse terrorism." And O'Brien says, "I wouldn't say that in front of Major Kira if I were you." So, they draw attention to the fact that the Federation has decided that those tactics were fine in the context of Bajor against the Cardassians but are not fine in this other context.

Lynette: Exactly.

Andi: When I was first thinking about this topic in general, I was thinking about Bashir and how one of the first things he says when he gets on *DS9* is he calls it the Frontier and Kira's reaction to that. [laughs] And it's always shaped how I thought of Bashir. And one of the arcs that I enjoy with Bashir is he learns somewhat from a lot of different people, but especially from O'Brien and especially from Kira.

Andrea: He's actually a character that shows significant personal development, which is fascinating.

Andi: Yeah, a really good character arc because the first season of *DS9*, I was like, "This fucker." [chuckles] I really was not digging him and I think that taking characters like that and having them grow and learn can be super powerful.

Jarrah: So, I mean, that's a good segue into. I actually want to say something nice about Jonathan Archer, so.

Andi: Whaaat?

Jarrah: I know. [laughs] Okay, so I guess with some caveats. So, I was reaching out to Twitter to ask about what *Enterprise* episodes we should consider for this discussion because *Enterprise* obviously being one of the later produced shows but being one of the ones that was set earlier in the timeframe, supposedly the first warp mission involving humans. And one of the ones that got suggested a lot, including by, I remember, Ben Rowe suggested it was *Shadows of P'Jem*, which is one on a proxy war, which is very interesting between the Vulcans and the Andorians. But then of course, we digressed a bit into just talking about Archer and his challenges, embracing difference.

And there was a really, really great comment from Claire from [@isolinearchick](#) on Twitter, who said, "There is a lot of Earth, read American exceptionalism, in Archer's attitude towards the Vulcans in *Broken Bough* and other early eps, which feels like a direct byproduct of imperialism. I think with the 2001 timeframe, it's supposed to be rugged individualism, but it doesn't age well. I think maturing out of that as much as he does is Archer's defining characteristic as a captain. Picard's wise, Kirk's the cowboy, etc. While Archer is the middle-aged white guy learning how to get comfortable with the new perspectives and not knowing everything." So, accurate.

But I will say that my favorite Archer moment is in *North Star*, which is one of the episodes that we watched, which is a Wild West themed episode where they find out that this group of humans on this planet are oppressing the aliens that had originally abducted them from Earth. And they're about to escape but Archer goes like, "Sorry, I just need to do one more thing." And the one more thing is he just really needs to punch the oppressor in the face. [laughs] It's not necessarily the ideal way out of that situation, but it felt very much like Kirk punching a Nazi. And I was very there for it at that point.

Lynette: Yeah, I have to agree.

Andrea: That was also my favorite part of that episode. [laughs] There was a couple of things about *North Star* that stuck out to me, as an indigenous person watching this, especially an indigenous person that also has like a settler background, my father's family is Dutch, there was very much this message coming from Archer saying, "Yes, you were subjugated, you were tortured, but we really need you to get over it if you're ever going to come back to Earth." And that is a consistent message that is delivered by settlers to indigenous people about having to get over things. Especially in this current context that we're living in right now, there's this kind of like this global ignorance coming from a lot of folks that, "Oh, this was X many years ago. Why can't you get over it?"

Lynette: It's a common refrain here as well, of course. And married to that in the Australian context is, anyone who doesn't look particularly indigenous has their authenticity and validity and identity questioned at levels that are, frankly, soul destroying.

Jarrah: Yeah, absolutely. I think *North Star* unfortunately kind of tries to flip things on its head in a way that ends up reinforcing some of the original problems, in addition to also not explaining how this entire town stayed in a Wild West tropes for like 300 years. But yeah, I mean, the proxy wars thing is something we see show up again and again in *Star Trek* and dealt with in different ways, often to critique Vietnam in the original series. And then, we get a lot of the Middle Eastern imperialism in *Enterprise*, which we will not go into in detail. But *Desert Crossing* is a good example if you want to watch a cringey episode on that in that area.

Another thing that we didn't really talk a lot about in our preparation for this episode is *Voyager*. But I did want to shout out and I will share in the links in the show notes, a really cool recent doctoral dissertation by Leigh McKagen on imperial narratives in *Voyager*. And she says that basically European imperialism and these ideologies are written into the narrative through the reliance on castaway and adventure narratives that serve to establish the right of the explorer in the way of American settler colonialism. The *Voyager* becomes the domestic space home against the wilds of the frontier of the Delta Quadrant. And they are over and over again encountering these "lost races," these never before encountered aliens. And in that way, that frame is just constantly reproduced.

Lynette: I think it's a superb piece of work. Made me want to go back and do another PhD. I have to tell you, [laughs] it's just delicious. I particularly like the idea of *Voyager* as the sort of the castaway. So, they can't really be an imperial force. They can't really be a colonizing force because there's just them and they're lost. They're disconnected from the Commonwealth, as it were. But I particularly like in an Australian context, we have a lot of castaway stories in Australia too. And you get the lone sailor who ends up living for 32 years with an indigenous group or a woman who's rescued. There's lots of white women who get rescued and live for many years with indigenous communities along the coastlines.

It struck me that this is a little bit like *Voyager*. *Voyager* tries, in a sense, to practice what the Federation is pushing for, but it's also very difficult for them because they're completely

disconnected, they're lost. So, everything they do is designed to get them back to the Commonwealth, to the Federation.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. Actually, one of the examples she talks about is *Course: Oblivion*. And there's another episode called *Demon*, I believe, where basically there's this class Y toxic planet that clones the entire crew, spoilers for *Voyager*, Andi, sorry. And there is an episode where they're basically, because they're clones of the entire crew, they also have the same drives and their drive is to return to Earth. So, they've left their planet, they're on Clone Voyager, they're heading towards Earth, but because they've made this decision, the whole thing falls apart and is destroyed. And she cites that as an example of resistance to that narrative because it's just the epic failure of that imperial colonial attempt. It's also a very sad episode.

Andi: What? A sad *Star Trek* episode? No.

Lynette: No, I don't want to do a spoiler alert, but that particular one has a sad ending.

Andi: Ohh.

Jarrah: So, as we come up to the conclusion, I did want to throw out there, given that *Star Trek* is so enmeshed in these narratives, because when I started, I was going like, is it even possible to think about what *Star Trek* would be like if it was decolonized or anti-imperial? And I know, Andi, you had some thoughts on how *Discovery* has treated this.

Andi: Yeah, I found some of the first season of *Discovery* was really interesting to me in this way because you had some of the Klingons especially overtly saying that the Federation was imperialist and fighting back on that in interesting ways. At one point, one of the Klingons, like, scoffs about the universal translator and is like, "It's just another way for you to impose your culture on us." And I wish that they had gone further with that idea. But it's also one of the few times I've seen that idea in *Star Trek*. You see it somewhat in *DS9*. Quark has a similar vibe to this in that he's like, "[sighs] Y'all Federation people think you're really, really special and cool, but actually you're not that great," and successfully making that point occasionally.

And even Mudd brought this up as the Federation encroaching onto to space and putting everyone under its control and squeezing everybody who doesn't want to be under Federation control out. And now, Mudd just doesn't want it because he's a criminal. [laughs] But I still thought it was an interesting idea that I hadn't seen explored very much outside of some cool *DS9* scenes. And so, it made me curious to see if *Discovery* was going to dive into that more. But unfortunately, I think it went mostly unrealized.

Andrea: It's funny because when I started watching *Discovery*, that was one of the things that stuck out to me the most.

Andi: Yeah.

Andrea: Is that you had untranslated Klingon. Like, people were just speaking their traditional language and that's how you started.

Andi: And note that people hated that. [Jarrah laughs]

Andrea: I loved it. [laughs] I thought it was great.

Lynette: I loved it too. And my feeling is that there were some amazing moments to present a decolonized *Star Trek* in *Discovery*. *Discovery* almost, certainly the first few episodes, to me was addressing some of the critique.

Andi: Absolutely. It was fascinating. I wish they had done more with it. And it kind of fell away-- with the Klingon storyline, it fell away even when the Klingons were still a part of the story. But it was definitely that Klingon pushback that was actually super fair and I loved it. And it was a thread that I wish they had continued.

Jarrah: I will say I also think Picard started off with a lot of promise on that, but I think ultimately failed, at least in season 1. It started off with the promise of a real strong critique of the Federation and how they behaved in the midst of a refugee crisis and by criminalizing synthetic life. And then, it kind of ends up-- because they had way too many plot lines going on and needed to resolve them, it ends up falling back into good guy, bad guy tropes and certain aliens being bad, even though they started off with what I think was a pretty powerful critique of the Federation as an imperialist institution.

But what would anti-imperialist *Star Trek* even look like? If we got to create a new series, is it possible? Could we do it? What should it contain?

Lynette: More indigenous writers.

Andi: Yeah, [Jarrah laughs] that's exactly what-- nonwhite writers. Start there.

Jarrah: Yeah. Leigh McKagen says that in terms of some of the, I guess, principles that we would need to look at abandoning the idea of the hero journey and she draws a lot on Ursula K. Le Guin's idea of the carrier bag theory of fiction. The idea being that the first tool that people developed would have been a carrier bag for food rather than a weapon so that we should be telling stories of ongoing-ness and relationships between all living things versus about progress. So, it's about process, not progress. And that it's stories about life, not stories about killing.

Andrea: And having like a federated power structure is not out of step with indigenous confederacy as well. You would have group decision making, consensus building and the respect of the difference of everybody who came to the table. So, you could still have a Federation in name for sure, but it's decision making and the power balance would be radically different.

Jarrah: Yeah, I think *Star Trek* has some of the nuggets there. Like, the idea of the reason we are going out is to encounter new and diverse life forms and to learn things, but they just don't demonstrate the learning enough and the commitment to being willing to admit that you're wrong as part of learning.

Lynette: Yes. Allowing people to make mistakes occasionally or admit there are mistakes is really important and it's not evident. There's a sort of confidence and a self-congratulatory confidence that's built in to the leadership of the Federation and not a lot of self-reflection or self-questioning.

Andi: More Bashir arcs.

Lynette: That's Bashir. Yeah, more Bashir arcs. [laughs]

Andrea: I think that *Discovery* starts to get to a little bit of the actual human journey of learning more than any of the other series did. Like, this is one of the things that when Jarrah and I did that panel, one of the reasons I liked *Discovery* is because it wasn't always about

the, "Oh, we're going to always find the diplomatic solution and we're always going to be right and we're always going to be this." There was darkness, there was growth, there was questioning and there was a lot of back and forth before you actually came to a resolution on something. That's something I really liked about *Discovery* and this is a great example of how current like social norms will create the lens through which these shows are built.

Lynette: And there's a very conscious attempt at diversity in *Discovery*, which is very welcome, I have to say.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I think also the way that they explore those relationships between people that aren't always just about love interests. So, even though Michael does have, I think, a type of hero's journey, it's definitely complicated and not infallible. But we also see so many different types of relationships and how the crew functions as a community and part of a larger intergalactic community.

Andrea: Cool.

Jarrah: So, we should probably wrap things up. But I did want to ask if anyone had any final thoughts.

Andi: This is a really great topic and I really appreciate our guests and it was a fascinating conversation. Thank you so much.

Lynette: Absolute pleasure to be able to dip back into *Star Trek* and think about it again and think about those indigenous perspectives that underpin all of my work and just make watching something like *Star Trek* so very interesting.

Andrea: Oh, thank you so much for having me. When I first started watching *TNG* as a little girl, I never would have thought in a million years that I would be able to marry my interest of *Star Trek* with my current career [laughs] and be able to talk about those two things and how they intersect. So, this has been wonderful.

Jarrah: I do have a call to action for settlers from the *Women at Warp* crew. So, listeners, who are settlers who maybe are new to this topic or not, because this is ongoing work that we have to do, I didn't want to let this opportunity go by without having a bit of a call to action, especially in light of the fact that there has been some really devastating confirmation in recent weeks that we have seen in Canada, although we know this is not an issue limited to Canada, with the confirmation of mass graves of children at former residential schools.

And so, the first thing that I wanted to ask listeners to do is it's a callout from Dr. Kisha Supernant, who is a Metis archaeologist at the University of Alberta who says, "Nonindigenous folks, do not ask indigenous friends and colleagues for our time and energy. Do not ask us what you can do. Do not burden us with your guilt. Amplify our voices, commit to the work, call for the truth, deeply listen to survivors and take action."

So, I think that's really important because people are going through a lot and as people who have benefited from these systems of oppression, we need to take it upon ourselves to educate ourselves on the history of colonial oppression and genocide, including residential schools, boarding schools, missions, seek out work by indigenous creators. There are so many books, there are websites, there are videos. And also important to learn about how we have benefited in terms of land, in terms of access to resources, in terms of our political rights, in terms of stereotypes, there are just many, many ways.

Another thing I really want to encourage folks to do is to demand accountability from government and religious institutions. We may have a federal election coming up sometime

soon, so not going to say how to vote, but if we don't show that we will vote on these issues, then there isn't an incentive for the government to change. And the government and previous governments are in court fighting residential school survivors, fighting indigenous children who are fighting for access to healthcare. It is shameful and it needs to stop. But we need to be able to actually put our money and our votes and our efforts where our mouths are on these issues and not just vote out of self-interest.

And then look at other areas where you can make a change. So, your family, your community, the workplace. And you can also support through donations and through volunteering, without centering your own feelings or your own presence, without asking for credit. You can support, for example, land defenders' organizations, residential school survivor societies in Canada, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. Reconciliation education initiatives. There are many options. We will put some of them in the show notes for this episode. So, please take some time and do some work and hopefully we will be able to make things a little bit better together.

So, that's about all the time we have for today. Thank you so much again to Andrea and Lynette for joining us. Andrea, where can people find you on the internet?

Andrea: So, you can find me on Twitter and Instagram [@katzehalifornia](#) and you can also find me on Twitch [@twitch.tv/katzehalifornia](#).

Jarrah: And, Lynette?

Lynette: You can find me on Twitter [@lynetterussell](#) and you can find me at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia at the Global Encounters Program.

Jarrah: And, Andi.

Andi: Yeah, easiest place to find me is Twitter [@firsttimetrek](#).

Jarrah: And I'm Jarrah. And you can find me at my finally migrated blog, [trekkiefeminist.com](#), and you can also find me on Twitter [@jarrahpenguin](#). To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit [womenatwarp.com](#) or find us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram [@womenatwarp](#). You can also email us at crew@womenatwarp.com. And for more Roddenberry podcasts, visit [podcasts.rodnenberry.com](#). Thanks so much for listening.

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