

[Women at Warp theme]

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

Aliza: Hey.

Kennedy: And Grace.

Grace: What's up, nerds?

Kennedy: We're so excited to talk about our famous Juneteenth edition of Women at Warp, but we'll get into that in just a little bit because first things first, before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first.

Our show is made possible by patrons on Patreon, and if you would like to become a patron, you can do so for as little as \$1 a month and then still get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit patreon.com/womenatwarp for more info.

And August happens to be one of our merch months. Aren't you some lucky ducks? Everyone at our Warp 5 tier or higher will automatically receive this year's convention merch at no additional cost. That's right. This merch is custom socks. They're so cute. We all have them, and we love them. And Aliza worked really hard in making them possible. So, thank you, Aliza, so very much.

Aliza: I am a sock maven.

Kennedy: Hey, you heard it here first.

Grace: A sockstress. Love it.

Aliza: Sockstress.

Kennedy: I love it. These amazing socks will also be for sale in Vegas, but at a higher price. Speaking of Vegas, Grace here and Sue will be at Star Trek Las Vegas next month, and we'll have a table in the vendor hall, so be sure to come by and say hello. Bring them bottles of water and snacks and let them go relieve themselves in the loo. Go ahead and look out for the table folk because the table folk look out for you. We'll have merch and free pronoun buttons. Get them while they last because those things are freaking amazing.

Grace: They go fast.

Aliza: And they do go fast.

Kennedy: And they go by really, really quickly. So, get on that.

Grace: Some pronouns faster than others, believe it or not.

Aliza: True, yeah.

Kennedy: But that doesn't mean that they're not appreciated by all. So, go ahead and get you some.

Aliza: True.

Kennedy: Speaking of fun things, one thing also appreciated by all is a good old-timey, old-fashioned fun happy birthday. So, we're wishing a happy birthday to one of our favorite patrons, Catherine, whose birthday was June 16th.

Aliza: Whoo-whoo.

Grace: [singing] Happy birthday.

Kennedy: [in singing tone] "This is your birthday song. It isn't very long." If you're looking for other podcast merch.

[chuckles]

Grace: And who isn't really?

Kennedy: Really, right? Who doesn't want cool Women at Warp swag? If you want swag, go to our TeePublic Store. There are so many designs and new ones being added all the time. And so much more than just T-shirts. You can get you a tote, a coffee, a magnet, a hat, if you will. Whatever you like, it's there. Find all of it at teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp. Now, that's about as jovial as I'm about to be for the rest of this conversation.

Aliza: [laughs]

Grace: As is your right.

Kennedy: I just want to be clear about that before we launch into things. This will be releasing after the fact, but Aliza and I decided to talk about one thing and it spawned into something else. And we just want to bring you this diasporic glory because we are joined also by Grace as a descendant of another diasporic peoples. We welcome you.

Grace: Thank you. Thank you. It's a pleasure to diaspora with you.

Kennedy: Yeah. Hey, we are all here because that's the point. No, diaspora is a monolith and therefore cannot be depicted in a singular sort of way. So, that's a really roundabout way to say our topic this afternoon, evening, morning, wherever in time you exist, is black pain in *Star Trek*. Now, how the heck did we get here? Why the heck would we focus on this? Because initially, Aliza and I were like, "Hey, let's talk about Michael Burnham." Michael Munkenburnham is her full name.

[chuckles]

And Benjamin Sisko for our exploration into obtaining the captaincy that beloved, long sought after fourth pip. And in doing research, both myself and Aliza, were reminded of some alarming truths that not only correspond with both Burnham and Sisko's journey to the captaincy, but literally every other black character in *Star Trek*. So, I'm sorry ahead of time for those of you whose worlds I managed to crush today, because I empathize with you. My world is crushed, and I felt that I needed to bring this in front of likeminded individuals like my friends, Aliza and Grace, here and also to you all who may or may not be feeling the same way because if nothing else, we want you all to be informed and we like giving you all of the information and all of the perspectives as intersectional as they maybe.

Aliza: And also, if I may, I'd like to give a shoutout to Dante because as one of our patrons of a certain level, Dante contributed this topic and suggested it, and that also helped spark us doing this episode. So, thank you, Dante.

Kennedy: Thank you, Dante.

Grace: Thank you, Dante.

Kennedy: You're welcome, Dante, because we're about to go in, my friend. So, *Star Trek*, for generations, for all 800 plus hours of its existence, has long been heralded as the epitome of representation for marginalized peoples. Can we all agree on that?

Aliza: Yeah. Sci-fi representation for marginalized people.

Grace: It's definitely upheld as an example of representation in classic TV in America.

Kennedy: Sure. And like Aliza was saying, it's just in science fiction in general, all of them aspire-- if they do aspire to be inclusive in their representation of characters and lifestyles and all that stuff, then they all aspire to mimic or at least somehow get close to that level of representation. And personally, it's been one of the things that I've loved. It's been my biggest stick, if you will, when it comes to the battle of fandom, has been the amount of representation that was in *Trek* before the rebirth of 2017, with *Discovery* and the consequent series therein.

But I look back at the alarming parallels between Sisko and Burnham and their quest to captaincy, I couldn't help but dig into some other folks here. So, the first thing, and I'll allow each of you to go through the list if you want, all of the black characters in *Star Trek*, repeat, all of them, with the exception of two people, have suffered a great deal of trauma, of displacement, of loss, of just really heart-wrenching obstacles. And I'll get into those two people later on. But holy smokes, like all of them, that's not what I wanted to find when I did my deep dive. I didn't want to find out that literally everybody comes from a place of destruction and displacement and forcible removal from their original home.

And I mean, from the rooter to the tooter, to use the term, right from Mayweather onwards, if you want to look at it chronologically in terms of, like, in-universe chronology as opposed to production chronology, it started with Mayweather. First, the only episode that we hear about anything about his life is the loss of his father. And that was, I think, second season, third season in. So it wasn't even like we had an introduction into this person and what he was like, what he was into, what informed his decisions. None of that. Just the first episode, boom, loss. Now, you've got to deal with it. Now, there's interpersonal issues between you and your brother. Now, you got to wrestle with whether or not you're obligated to pick up the family business or pursue your dream and what that means for a black man in particular. [takes a deep breath]

It's frustrating. It's frustrating. You want to give *Enterprise* and that crew kind of like a pass, because we all know that show was not designed to focus on progressing the narrative, it was more designed to flesh the narrative out and inform some of the decisions in *TOS* and the *Foundation*, the *Federation*, yada, yada, yada. But it was still made in the early 2000s, 2001, somewhere in there. So, here you have an opportunity to do better than previous iterations of representation black science fiction had given us, and here we are. No shade at Anthony Montgomery at all. I'm just saying he wasn't given much to do, and it's a shame because he's amazing.

Aliza: M,-hmm. There was also this weird tropey thing that kept happening with Mayweather where he was always like-- It was kind of like the Harry Kim stuff, where it was like he was

always dying and becoming reborn, or his body was weirdly transformed in this way and then he had to get saved. That happened a lot with Mayweather.

Kennedy: He was always getting hurt. And on one hand, I get it, because as a child born in space, he's not used to gravitational eddies on planets. So, yeah, he's going to misjudge a couple ledges when he's, I don't know, cliff diving on Risa 4. Like, I get that.

Grace: Like you do.

Kennedy: But it literally comes down to, those are the two major things that we remember about Mayweather is that he was a space boomer, one of the first kids to be born in space, and that's why he was always getting hurt on a planet. And we know that his father died. That's literally it. We know nothing else about this man. So, how good is that of representation, really?

Grace: Especially when you think of his kind of introductory scene where we're introduced to him being like, "Oh, no, I know the special sweet spot on the ship where you can just hang out upside down there because gravity is weird." And that's such a neat little moment of him being like, "Oh, yeah, there's all kinds of stuff that you only really pick up if you've been in space your entire life."

Grace: So we're from the get go given that he's already, aside from what we would understand in terms of storytelling that we've kind of seen before or could see, there's this whole new world that we haven't seen, really explored with a character of, we know people in *Star Trek* who have been living in space their whole lives, but what is it like to be one of the early ones? What is that like in terms of making him feel different from the people around him who are used to having solid ground beneath their feet, literally? And then we just don't really get to follow up on that. We only get it followed up on through the context of trauma.

Kennedy: Period.

Grace: What a wasted potential right there.

Kennedy: Seriously.

Aliza: Yeah. We could have seen much deeper stuff surrounding Mayweather, but I will say, overall, not to go too deep into my eternal rant on *Enterprise*-- [laughs]

Kennedy: I mean, it's rantable.

Grace: That should have been theme song right there. "It's been a long rant getting from there to here."

[laughter]

Kennedy: Then, it's metal. [singing] "It's been a long rant, getting from there to here."

Grace: [singing] We're going to talk about how the Raiders screwed over Mayweather.

Aliza: I have a very specific complaint about *Enterprise* though, and it's that it's actually much more white male centric than it plays itself off to be. And if you look at the cast, the series regulars, but then also all of the guest stars for a long time, was just white people with squiggles on their foreheads. And sometimes they were not only white people with squiggles on their forehead, but they also just culturally didn't have anything else going on. They were just humanoid aliens that were effectively white people in space. So, yeah, go

back and watch some of those guest stars. And what's funny is, as an actor, I recognize how dope some of those guest star roles were. But the way they cast them and sometimes the way that those episodes played out, they fell kind of flat for me. [chuckles] But yeah, when you go back and watch *Enterprise*, if you ever do, just keep that in mind, count how many of the guest stars were just either straight-up white or maybe were-- If they were people of color, they were like very, very light skinned or white passing. It gets frustrating.

Kennedy: And then, if they weren't light skinned or white passing, they were under three hours of makeup.

Aliza: Yeah, that's my complaint about *Enterprise*. And I think the other way that Mayweather and a lot of the nonwhite cis male main character series regulars were treated kind of stems from that. That show was very white male focused.

Kennedy: Yo, you're not wrong. It's almost like the producers and the writers and the showrunner in general was coming off of not one, but two, really, really diverse shows and was afraid they were going to lose some of their conservative fan base and decided to write something catered specifically to their interests.

Grace: Wait. What?

Kennedy: Can't imagine them doing something like that again. Heavens.

Grace: My God. That's a little out there, don't you think?

Kennedy: You're right. Maybe I should dial it back a bit. Let me get focused.

Aliza: Be realistic.

Kennedy: You're right.

Grace: And now, let's all just have a bitter, bitter laugh together.

[bitter laughter]

Kennedy: We can move on to Uhura, and I include her both in *TOS*, *TAS* and *Strange New Worlds*, because went two series without knowing anything about Uhura. Didn't even know what her first name was. Didn't find out her first name till like 50 years later and three films into an alternate universe reboot. Still don't know anything about her, where she come from. All we know is that she cute as hell, she speaks a bunch of languages, and her name is Swahili for something. But we don't know.

Then, we get to *Strange New Worlds*. Wait, actually, before we even get to *Strange New Worlds*, let's talk about how Uhura was constantly being flung across the ship. [chuckles] And I understand that space turbulence is different, and people are going to go fly in. There's no seatbelts. Who knows why? But my issue with her going flying across the bridge is that she was constantly being yanked up. Not picked up, not, "Hey, you all right, sis? You good? You're wearing nothing. Are your thighs protected? How's your hamstring feeling? The way you fell into it--" They just yank her up and toss her in the chair. And it's just like, I hear older Trek fans and then wag their fingers at me when they talk about, "We need to remember Gene's vision. And it was iconic at the time." And it's like, "Well, this is what you're showing me." I don't see Uhura being treated with kindness and grace and dignity.

In fact, the most iconic scene that we know of, the first interracial kiss on television, was nonconsensual. So, why are you forcing me? Why are you insisting I should say that I revere

this moment in classic television when it's like you won't even admit what the issue is for itself. Like, if you took this out of context and just put this on TV, it's like, "Wow, she did not want to do that." "He did not want to do that." Why am I listing this in the halls of TV greatness? This is alarming. And Uhura deserved better. Nichelle deserved better, and Celia deserves better. Like, what's happening? And I resent the fact that when we finally do learn about Uhura from *Strange New Worlds*, we find out that she lost not one, but both of her parents. And like so many other black people, her grandparents raised her. And again, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

But here you have an opportunity to be like, "Hey, here's this princess, highborn individual from a long line of prestigious, wealthy, influential, whatever, royal people who know going against the family curve and not doing her royal duties and is choosing to go into Starfleet because she's excellent at languages and has to deal with that type of conflict." That is interesting, that is substantial, that is positive representation. And I just resent the fact that after 50 some years, we find out that Uhura suffered loss like everybody else. Like, damn, sis can't catch a break in the future. But past neither? What's happening?

Grace: Also, if we talk about the fact that we've got two characters in a row on this list who have regular bodily harm as kind of a recurrent thing for them.

Kennedy: Hello.

Grace: Yeah. We get Mayweather falling off of things. We get Uhura getting jerked around physically.

Kennedy: Hello.

Aliza: Mm-hmm.

Kennedy: Thank you for pointing that out. Dang.

Grace: Is this going to come up again, you think, on this list?

Kennedy: Who knows? Let's see. Let's remain objective. [laughs] Let's remain objective and stick to the facts, because next, chronologically speaking, on the list is Michael Burnham. Michael Burnham.

Grace: We all just had to take a minute there to go, "Michael Burnham. Oh."

Kennedy: If there was a list of tragedies for a character to suffer in any given genre, in any given medium, Michael Burnham has ticked them all. All of them. The only one she hasn't suffered is the loss of a child. But that's it.

Grace: Please don't put that on Michael also. Paramount, CBS, don't do this to us. She has been through enough.

Kennedy: But coincidentally, we do see her witness the loss of a parent. We see her mother experience the loss of a child, the loss of a spouse. She loses everything. And then, she also, in the midst of that, loses her humanity by being raised by Vulcans. Then, [laughs] she gets penalized for her commanding officer's inactivity. I keep saying it that way because that's exactly what it was.

Grace: After losing a mother figure, a role model, someone she looked up to--

Kennedy: And gets turned into a scapegoat and goes to prison, is imprisoned and becomes a pariah about the audacity of ingenuity because that's all it was. That's all it was. Michael had the audacity to offer another point of view that was not popular, was not easy, wasn't even really safe.

Aliza: Offering an alternative and making a choice that if, say, Kirk had done that, he would have been praised.

Grace: Absolutely. They would have said, "Oh, well, he was just saying what we were all thinking, and he was just acting and doing what the guys up top were too afraid to do." But no, Michael goes to jail.

Kennedy: Michael goes to jail.

Aliza: *Ernest Goes to Jail*. Remember those movies?

[laughter]

Grace: Ernest suffers another emotional setback for the entirety of her character arc.

Kennedy: Yeah. And then has to redeem herself in a multitude of ways. Has to deal with the traumatic experience of having Spock as a brother because that was rough.

Grace: That's got to have so much baggage on its own already.

Kennedy: That's rough. That's rough. That's rough. And then, in order to save sentient life as we know it, Michael has to forsake the first person she ever fell in love with who was problematic BT-dubs.

Grace: Yeah. Lot to dig into there.

Kennedy: Even though I will always have a soft spot for Ash Tyler, problematic. I can admit that. Problematic. Flings herself-- Oh, no, does a bunch of temporal incursions first, jumps back and forth in time, because that doesn't affect anybody physically, mentally, emotionally. Flings herself through the void of space and time to the future. Lands face first on a planet. No ship. No ship, no shuttlecraft. Face first. There's plexiglass and the planet. That's how she landed. [exhales] And then, she don't have a crew. It's just a never-ending story of obstacles that Michael Burnham has overcome. And it's one of the reasons it makes for such a dynamic, compelling character to watch.

But at the same time, when does it stop being compelling and start being emotional abuse? Because you're not going to sit there and tell me that you don't know that black women overcome obstacles and challenges in the most mundane, everyday types of ways, and then with good responsibility, put that on television and not offer, at the very least, a trigger warning. I feel there's a lack of responsibility here with the depiction of all of these black characters and the trauma that they endure.

Grace: And to say that on top of what Michael has already been through when the show starts, just like in that pilot episode, in that two-parter, she goes through so much that we see already, and we establish that she's been through so much shit. And then, I feel like there's a level of audacity of the show being like but she still needs to earn her captainhood.

Kennedy: Right.

Aliza: Mm-hmm.

Grace: She has taken some serious lumps here. The idea that isn't enough-- she's got more backstory in those two episodes than we see some captains go through the entire show having.

Aliza: Yeah, I just want to jump in, talk about that for a second, about the idea that they had to earn. I saw a Screen Rant article where literally it says "Why Sisko and Burnham both needed to earn their captaincy over three seasons." Needed.

Grace: Needed to. It wasn't a writer's choice. It was a need.

Aliza: I take such huge frustration from seeing-- Yeah, the writers chose to write it that way. They didn't "need" to earn anything. It's that it was a choice made by the people who created the shows. I don't think these characters actually, even the way they were written, they didn't need to show or earn anything. They had already earned it. And we're going to get to Sisko in a second, but we've already talked about how Burnham had gone through a lot and was super, super qualified for what she was doing, and she was-- [crosstalk]

Kennedy: Overqualified.

Aliza: Overqualified. She was doing things that would have gotten other *Star Trek* captains praised and promoted--

Kennedy: Promotions, whole fleets.

Aliza: And then Sisko, he was in the fucking Battle of Wolf 359. He went through so much with that. He more than earned getting a promotion by the time that show started, day one. For anyone who's listening and has these conversations out in the wild with other Trekkies, I want to urge you to call people out and say, "Hey, they didn't 'need' three seasons to earn anything. That was a choice that was made for the two black leads of *Star Trek* shows." End of rant.

Kennedy: Period. No, no, uh-huh. Ain't the end of rant. Go ahead and take that pin out of it because I got another one. Because we're going to fast forward to the *Next Generation* and how Geordi was born disabled, which not a problem, but they had the technology to fix this man's vision, had the technology, and made the choice not to give it to him. Just gave him this visor and forced him to see swaths of color, instead of giving him the surgeries. And to what you were saying just now, Aliza, about him needing to go through that. He didn't need to go through it because they had the technology. I can understand if Starfleet Medical didn't develop the optical technology to replace someone's vision. We don't see him with actual eyeballs until *Insurrection*. No dang, first contact.

[laughter]

Which means that is seven whole seasons and a film and a half before we get to see him. There's episodes about his vision and this visor being hijacked and his bodily autonomy being abused by Duras sisters and countless others. So, why choose to make the character go through all that? One.

Two, on another level, yes, all of his parents and his family was in Starfleet, but they were Starfleet parents. They weren't paying attention to him. So, it's just inconsistent. If they're Starfleet parents and they know of the technology to fix their son's vision, and they choose not to, which is that? That just lets me know that you, as a writer, didn't want him to have it easy. Him having contention between not one but two Starfleet parents and a Starfleet sibling, and him wanting to carve his own path or live up to those expectations isn't

contentious enough. No, no. Let's make him physically disabled as well and not give him access until a film.

Aliza: Actually, I'm going to disagree on this one because I hear what you're saying, but I think it's kind of a slippery slope in sci-fi to always say, "Well, they could just fix all disabilities. So, why don't they?" It's actually really empowering to see disabled people in the future because it's kind of eugenicist to think, like, "In the future, we'll be able to just cure everyone of their disabilities and everyone will be perfect." What I'm saying is, I actually don't think Geordi's disability is a show-- I don't think it really qualifies here as putting black pain on him, like forcing the character to suffer through that way. I wouldn't include it on this list.

Kennedy: I want to be clear. I don't count the fact that him having a disability is a problem. I don't perceive that to be black pain. My thing is, why create the extra obstacle for him by saying that the technology exists. If the technology doesn't exist, fine. He sees however he can see, and there's nothing wrong with that. But the fact that they mentioned that, I feel, is problematic.

Aliza: Do you remember when they mentioned it? Because another thing though is that at some point during the movies, that's when LeVar Burton was like, "I'm not wearing that shit anymore." So, they literally just had to make it so that they had the technology, so that they could explain away why he didn't need the visor anymore.

Kennedy: Pretty early. I think it was in one of the first-- I think if it wasn't the first season, it was definitely within the first three, because we were seeing something through Geordi's vision, and it was kind of cringey and ableist, but they were like, "Oh, wow, how do you see this way and how do you make it--?" That was a little upsetting, but I think he mentioned it then that he could have "fixed" his vision and just chose not to, which is just like, well-- if this is the advantage that his visor gives him over literally everybody else, then why present an opportunity for an out if it's such an advantage? It's weird. It's this weird way-- [crosstalk]

Aliza: Yeah, I don't know. That's weird. I'll have to go back and watch, because that's really interesting.

Grace: You also would need to dig into a lot of conversations in disabled spaces about how some people view any disability as something that inherently needs to be fixed. And some people view their disability or what makes them different as an inherent part of themselves and something that they live with and is part of their personal identity. And everyone has a different kind of relationship to that.

Kennedy: Right. And I agree. And they were on that path by not presenting Geordi as someone who was fumbling all over the place or anything like that, that he was not only proficient but exceptional in everything that he did.

Aliza: Yeah. They weren't telling him to act more blind. I'm looking at you, *Dollhouse*.

Kennedy: If your goal is truly to represent a future where people with "disabilities" can exist without being made to feel any kind of way or discrimination or any of that, then why introduce the idea that he had the opportunity, that his parents had the opportunity to do it and chose not to? That's something that could have been left on the floor. It's this weird gaslighty thing that writers do with black characters. Like, "Yeah, well, you could have been saved, but losey-losey, ain't you lucky to have survived otherwise." And it's just like, "What?"

Grace: And the fact that it was someone else's choice and not his. Also like, that he didn't choose down the line how much he wanted to-- argh.

Kennedy: Exactly. So the fact that the universe told us that there was another option for how he perceived the world, instead of just accepting that this is how he perceives the world, period. And then his conflict, his interpersonal issues are the fact that he comes from a military family, and everybody expects the best from him. And even though he's the literal greatest of all time, it's still not enough. Again, another way to create and explore conflict without forcing the character to go through unnecessary trauma.

Grace: Can you imagine if they'd pulled that shit with *Daredevil*? if at some point they'd been like, "Oh, no, your dad totally knew there was a way to fix your eyesight immediately. He had a little canteen of eye cleaner on him right when he got hit by all those chemicals and just decided not to use it because he thought, 'Eh, kid needs another challenge in his life.'" People would be up in arms over that in a way that I don't think they have fully-- I'm not articulating this well.

Kennedy: You're doing a good job. I feel like it's weird to go through the decision to include a person who's disabled and then create this weird saviorism thing where-- [sighs] Because Geordi could have had the same issues with other things in space without us knowing that his parents chose not to augment his vision. That's weird. Now, that makes me look at them sideways instead of them just being parents, high ranked in Starfleet, with questionable parenting skills. There was a layer of complexity that was--

Now, I'm trying to articulate it. Like, "Hmm, this sandwich is crunchy, there's texture to it. Num, num, num. This is great." But that pickle that you have on top is not a sweet pickle that complements all the yummy things on the sandwich. No, no. It's a red-hot fire cheek burner pickle that you now have to figure out, is this adding to the sandwich that is Geordi, or is it-- [crosstalk]

Grace: Pickle just came out of nowhere, yeah.

Kennedy: Out of nowhere. Like, oh, my gosh, is that cayenne?

Aliza: Well, okay, so I will say we can agree to disagree, but here's the thing. I think the way that I'm looking at it is also through a very, like my personal lens and reading into Geordi's disability and whether or not his parents had a choice and made a choice not to cure him or fix it or whatever, there actually is a lot that I think I would be giving the writers too much credit, because I actually do think that is a thing, [chuckles] unfortunately. And I'm just thinking about black kids who go for years and years without diagnosing-- not just black kids. But this is a thing that happens in our community where a black parent is told, "Your kid has ADHD," and then the black parent is like, "Cool, cool, cool. Yeah, right. Never mind." I literally hear this from black autistic people, black people with ADHD who are adults now. And they literally say, "I found out years later that my parents hid my diagnosis from me." So, I don't know.

I think I'm probably reading too much into this, but I feel like this is a separate conversation from the black pain thing. But I do recognize that you do have a point here about it just makes it even weirder and more complicated when you look overall at Geordi as a character through this lens of the black pain that the shows kind of keep putting him through. So, yeah.

Kennedy: Because I agree with all of that, what you're saying, Aliza, for sure. And I recognize that how I phrased this can be perceived inaccurately. So, I want to save it, in this case, I should probably clarify the black pain is in the viewer, because if we didn't know that Geordi had an opportunity to augment his vision and this is just accept him as he is, then it wouldn't be painful to see him have issues when they arise. And conversely, if we didn't know that his parents augmented his vision, I should say that his parents augmented his vision, with episodes where his visor is hijacked would be that much more poignant. I mean,

first of all, that's a violation, so why do we need to see that anyway? But then, it's like, "Damn, now we know that bro man didn't have to go through this, and now he's being weaponized? That's extra harsh."

So, it's like, as a viewer-- And again, this might be seeing from a lens of growing up with LeVar Burton. Like, I don't want to see him get mistreated and misused in this way. But I'll concede that, yeah, the black pain isn't necessarily Geordi's experience because of all those really complex issues that we just reviewed. But as a black audience member, I just like, "Why are you putting him through? Why? Why? What does it serve? What does this resolve? What does this inform?" Those decisions are questionable because you see it in Worf.

Aliza: Well, speaking of. Shall we, yeah--? Should we move on to Worf? Because--
[chuckles]

[laughter]

Grace: Let's talk about Worf.

Kennedy: From start to finish, nothing but pain and suffering.

Aliza: What's wild is-- I just want to jump in real, real quick before you give us a really amazing analysis, Kennedy, because what's funny to me about Worf sometimes is he's one of those black folks that will basically put themselves through shit because, "This is the way the world is. And as a black person, I must suffer," that kind of shit. That's what I see in Worf. The way he reads into Klingon culture is, like, the most stringent, the most strict, the most conservative version of it. And it's like, "Dude, you don't have to do all that. You can be Klingon the way you need to be Klingon. You're subjecting yourself to this stupid high standard that even Klingons who grew up as Klingons don't go through. What are you doing--?" [crosstalk]

Kennedy: They're like, "Bro, relax."

Aliza: Is he a Klingon hotep?

Grace: [laughs]

Kennedy: Yes, I was just about to say. Worf is a hotep. And every time I get a chance to do the first and only panels with Sue at conventions, I always say that. And people look at me like, "What does that mean?" And I'm like, that lets me know that you don't have enough black friends first and foremost.

Aliza: Yeah, I think I remember you bringing that up. [laughs]

Kennedy: Because it happened in Chicago.

Grace: And you just know that he projects that shit onto Alexander too. "I had to suffer through all this shit, so you should suffer also. I lost my parents, so you stand here and look at your dead mother on the ground."

Kennedy: Okay, to clarify for those of you who are unfamiliar with what a hotep is. A hotep is usually loud member of the black community.

Aliza: Male. Usually male, right?

Kennedy: Usually male but there can be female hotep.

Aliza: Herteps.

Kennedy: Herteps, see Dr. Hadassah Olayinka Ali-Youngman pre-PhD from *A Black Lady Sketch Show*, because that sounds like a parody, but she exists, okay. That is a real person. A hotep is usually a very loud member of the black community who takes it upon themselves to educate themselves and others, usually incorrectly, about elements and nuances of pan-African culture. And we say it this way because, as we all know, in America, black folks who live here that are not here by choice, were removed from their heritage and their culture and their religions and their languages and literally everything else, and suffer a great loss of knowledge in terms of having access to these ancestral cultural things.

Similarly, Worf has lost access to a very proud culture and grew up in a displaced location. He grew up with humans, was raised by a very loving family, and provided him all of the things he could possibly need in his low Klingon on life, and still he felt the void. You'll find that in a lot of hoteps. They find information about various cultures on the African continent and pretty much cherry pick ideals that appeal to them and further their agenda and their ideologies therein, and will loudly declare these things as truths and really don't do a good enough job of cross-referencing other sources of information so that they may get a well rounded and well-informed view of the topics they are discussing.

Worf is all of-- if you're here, like, "Yep, yep, that's Worf." That's all of that is Worf. He is more Klingon than Klingon. He knows the operas. He reads scripture every night. He don't want his women to be anything but barefoot and pregnant. What else? "I wasn't raised with you, little brother. And even though you were raised in Klingon culture and spoke the language indigenously, as opposed to through an audio tablet like I had to, I know what's best as far as the continuance of this house. And therefore, you shall do what I say because I am older brother, brother." And what could Kurn do but be like, "Dag, you're not wrong. But jeez."

[laughter]

"I was better being an only child." And then interprets his culture in a harmful way. Interprets his culture in a harmful way and perpetuates it in a harmful way as we established through Alexander, as we established through his relationships with literally any woman who cares to like him.

Grace: Any woman.

Kennedy: Literally anyone, Klingon or not. He's just like, "You can't handle me because I'm a man. And man do manly things. And you're a woman and you don't know what a man does."

Grace: [crosstalk] -like, "I've been a man multiple times over, bro."

Kennedy: Right. And K'Ehleyr was like, "Whatever. You still want this puss?"

[laughter]

Kennedy: "You still want this puss? Stop playing. My holodeck or yours. All right?" And then, he sat there and pouted about it afterwards. "What do you mean you won't marry me? We have mated, female. You are my mate." She's like, "Bro, I have cardio in like 20 minutes."

Grace: "I have a job. Thank you. I got my own shit to deal with."

Kennedy: "Literally came in this thing in a torpedo tube. And you want to talk to me about responsibility? Please stop. Please stop." And just as far as an opportunity to represent Klingon culture for the first time, that wasn't orientalist and super racist in some way, it still ended up being problematic. And yes, Klingon culture inherently is problematic because it's feudal and it's definitely patriarchal, and they like to fight all the time. So, yes, there are other lenses that we can critique this through. But holy smokes, I don't know how else they could have depicted Worf except this way except as a hotep. But, man, if it wasn't painful to watch. Holy smokes, poor Alexander.

Grace: I know, right?

Kennedy: Poor K'mtar. I worry about that kid.

Grace: I know. I keep thinking also, because he grew up on Earth with his Russian parents, the Rozhenkos, who we kind of suss out, they seem pretty Jewy, they seem Russian Jewy. And that in and of itself is a diaspora right there. So, what must it have been like for them to be like, "Well, this is our culture also that we want you to be a part of," for him to be like, "Nope, this one, only this one," That must have been an experience. And then also going from living with Worf for Alexander to living with the Rozhenkos, what must have that sort of cultural mix been like.

Kennedy: Right. If anything, I feel like the Rozhenkos were a great place for Worf and Alexander to land because as a diasporic coded people, they would know what it's like to grasp for a culture that you don't have immediate access to, and I imagine would probably be super compassionate towards all of his issues. "No. Klingons do not eat spinach, only meat." She's like, "All right." [crosstalk]

Grace: Oh, I guess that means you don't want your rugelach then.

Kennedy: Fine, fine.

Grace: So, I'll put this away. More rugelach for mom.

Kennedy: "More borscht for us, fine." "Hang on. Borscht is a warrior's drink." "Okay, so borscht is okay, but not-- all right. Whatever you need." I'm sure--

Grace: Okay, honey, it's your journey.

Kennedy: Yeah, I'm sure they were super, super supportive of him, but I imagine that probably informed some of his decisions. Like, "Hmm, no, I'm rebelling. Argh. How dare you support me? How dare you take me to this concert? No, argh."

Aliza: I now want to see a teenage Worf show.

[laughter]

Aliza: "How dare you take me to this concert?" Oh, God, that's great.

Grace: "I will not be attending Hebrew school."

Aliza: Oh, my God. It has to be this. I need to see this show. I think we should make it though.

Kennedy: But now, we've got to figure out who we're casting.

Aliza: Yeah.

Kennedy: Ooh. I already got it. Caleb McLaughlin from *Stranger Things*.

Aliza: Ooh, yes. Oh, my God. Oh, God, we got to write this.

Grace: He'd kill it.

Aliza: Let's make a pitch. We've got to write the pilot.

Kennedy: No. Hold on. Actually, I didn't say that.

Aliza: Who?

Kennedy: That didn't happen. We're not casting nothing.

Grace: Oh, no.

Aliza: Retract.

Grace: No one can steal your idea if you don't say it out loud.

Kennedy: Oh, man. Although, technically, they can't take anything they've heard from the internet because we're an LLC, baby.

Grace: Yay. LLC, yeah, you know me.

Aliza: This is the worst transition ever. But speaking of LLCs, let's talk about the Siskos.

Grace: Let's talk about the Siskos.

Kennedy: That, in fact, is a corporate entity for sure.

Grace: Sisko's a registered trademark.

Kennedy: Sisko, hey, there's a transition there. Hey. Perfect.

Grace: Let's Sisko to the Siskos.

Kennedy: So, let's focus on-- I mean, can we start from the beginning and talk about Joseph Sisko?

Grace: Let's.

Kennedy: He lost his wife and basically was sexually assaulted by a wormhole alien. No, we don't want to talk about that?

Grace: Good lord.

Kennedy: And lost his wife, had to raise his son on his own. Okay, cool. Everything's great. Everything's great. Everything turned out great because Ben went to Starfleet. He's doing something with himself. He done found a pretty young thing, married her, had a baby. Everything's great. Oh, no. What's this? The Borg?

Grace: The Borg.

Kennedy: The Borg.

Grace: The Borg come and [beep] everything up for everyone.

Kennedy: This is wide open, vast void of space. They show up where him and his family are stationed. Cool, I get it, we got to find a way to tie in TNG with this new series. Fine.

Grace: And we're going to do that via trauma.

Kennedy: Immediate trauma. We're immediately going to watch this man lose his wife.

Grace: Lose his coworkers, lose his wife, almost lose his kid.

Kennedy: Yeah. Immediately watch this sweet cherub of a child lose his mother, and survive assimilation. Fast forward to Ben Sisko getting stationed on this raggedy, funky, musty, crunchy, dusty behind station where nothing works and the woman in charge hates everything. Yeah, go ahead, black man. Do you, clean this up.

Aliza: Oh, also having to endure a meeting with his superior, who was the [beep] [laughs] Borg that destroyed his life.

Kennedy: Now, I got to look you in your face and not spit in it? This is wrong. I need to leave. I need to leave.

Grace: Oof, oof. Not only do we get trauma, we get really uncomfortable traumatic followup.

Kennedy: Yeah. Now, we get emotional trauma. Now, I get emotional labor.

Grace: Survivor's guilt is the gift that keeps on giving.

Kennedy: Yeah. Now, fortunately, Picard had enough sense not to give Sisko a hard time for being justifiably upset at him.

Grace: Yeah.

Aliza: He took his lumps, credit to him.

Kennedy: But he sure as shit didn't say anything human either. "I know this doesn't mean much, but I am terribly sorry for your loss." Nothing. Nothing.

Aliza: Mm. Go ahead, girl, give us nothing.

Grace: Gave us Elizabeth II at the death of Princess Di. Just being like, "Yes, this is sad."

Aliza: How sad for all of us.

Grace: Kay.

Kennedy: So, we're going to send Sisko out to the ass crack of space because, literally, it's the boldiest of places that no one has gone before.

Grace: No one's bold enough to go there.

Kennedy: "Hey, you're going to sit here and mediate the conflict between the space Serbians and the space Bosnians. Go. Ready? Break. Oh, you have to deal with someone who was enslaving an entire race of people? That can't be too sensitive for you, right? You're good, right? Yeah."

Grace: "No big, right? No big."

Kennedy: "Make sure you keep the station in one place, and I'll expect those updates on my desk by Friday."

Grace: "Hey, you're dealing with constant internal trauma, right? Why don't you deal with an entire people dealing with that on a cultural level? You'll have a lot to talk about."

Kennedy: "Go ahead and clock right in for that emotional labor. Do what you got to do. Just subdue it and get to work. Have fun."

Grace: "Have fun. Make us proud."

Kennedy: "There's not going to be a school on this raggedy station for your son."

Grace: "There's no school for your beloved child."

Kennedy: "Sorry. Hope you weren't trying on educating your kid. [laughs] Okay, bye."

Grace: Picard out.

Kennedy: Enterprise out.

Aliza: I want to also add, and I stand by this term, the space Karen, because guess what? It's not cool for you, as a local figurehead, religious figure, to come and harass and bemoan the spiritual importance of a human who comes into your neck of the wood with some authority just because, what, he's human? I mean, it's underlying-- It's like very thinly veiled that she has a problem with him because of, mm, other traits of his. But him not being Bajoran is what she says is her issue with him. But yeah, I just wanted to point that out. Kai Winn's distaste of Sisko.

Grace: There are definitely some cases where you can argue that groups of people that have been through persecution specifically because of their culture, having the desire to protect their culture, that is something that you can definitely argue on behalf of. I'm thinking of an instance, when I was in college, we were doing an educational thing on a reservation nearby, and before went in, we talked to the elders and the people who are in charge of the school board, just to be, like, "Everything on the up and up here. Are we cool with this?" And we got to hear some very fair concerns of them being like, "I'm not sure how I feel about you coming onto our reservation and teaching us about our culture when we've had so much taken away from us by your people." And so, there was a lot of compromise that needed to be made there. There was a lot of lines that needed to be drawn for everybody's comfort.

Aliza: I totally agree with that. And here's where I'll counter, I think, in this particular situation with Kai Winn's frustrations, she really narrowed in on him.

Grace: Oh, yeah. She did not like him. It's incredibly personal. I'm saying there are situations where that is applicable. This is not one of them.

Aliza: Right, totally.

Kennedy: Yeah. Especially considering that I feel like a lot of her animosity towards Sisko was fueled by the fact that he was there when Kai Opaka was left behind. Here is someone who politically was stronger than Winn.

Grace: Who was more beloved than Winn.

Kennedy: Right. More compassionate, more reasonable, all of those things.

Grace: Probably more spiritually attuned, also.

Kennedy: More progressive. Who knows? She was the one that checked his pot and realized that he was the emissary. Winn probably was salty about the fact that she was given the position of Kai only after Opaka was no longer able to continue filling it.

Grace: And Opaka was made a murder, basically.

Kennedy: I mean, obviously, she gone at this point, but Opaka didn't die.

Aliza: Right. She just stayed in the gamma. [crosstalk]

Kennedy: So. it took her being unable to fulfill her duties as Kai for Winn to step up. She wasn't elected, she wasn't selected. Like, there was no due process.

Grace: She was the second choice.

Kennedy: Yeah. So, she already salty about that. Then, here comes some space negro claiming to be the next coming? Absolutely not. [laughs] Absolutely not. And it's just like the optics of it were great leader-- [crosstalk]

Aliza: And it's coded-- The thing is, I don't know who wrote that storyline. I don't know what that writer's background or experience was. But the way it's written, it makes it very relatable for those of us who have experienced a usually white lady-- Sorry, white ladies, but it's true. Usually, white lady coming in and saying, "Why are you here? What is your designation?" [laughs]

Grace: Older white lady going, "Um, so why do you deserve to be here?"

Aliza: Basically. Yeah. Like, I can't tell you how many times I've experienced that at the hands of white women in my life. So, yes, I feel like-- Just wanted to point that out that that's a big part of what we see Sisko experiencing. And yeah, it sucks.

Kennedy: And not for nothing, he's also the face of the Federation in this sector of space.

Grace: So, it's like doubly an outsider coming in and stepping on her toes to her.

Kennedy: Not everybody but outside of the Kais, just in general, people weren't excited overall for Starfleet to be getting involved. Like, the Bajorans wanted their own time to be independent. The Cardassians were resentful of the fact that they can no longer be oppressive jerks. It was just a lot of stuff going on. And instead of reassigning Picard to something this diplomatically as volatile, they assigned somebody who was trying to quit. Sisko was trying to quit. He was trying to quit. He's trying to hang up his commission, retire his pips and go home and go sit down for a minute and contemplate life without his spouse. But they wouldn't let him leave the work. It's kind of akin to not letting someone just expecting labor in a moment of extreme emotional duress is weird to me.

Grace: It's kind of [beep] Starfleet.

Kennedy: Kind of weird. And then, when he turns around and does an excellent job of not only keeping the peace but also protecting the Bajorans and everybody on that space station and the Cardassians when they happen to need protecting even from themselves at some points.

Grace: And stepping up in terms of kind of being a spiritual figurehead also.

Kennedy: Yeah. Takes not one, not two, but three whole seasons, just like somebody else who know to get that fourth pip because he "needed" to wait. He "needed" to get better. As if everything else that man went through leading up to that wasn't good enough.

Grace: You know that quote about how Ginger had to do everything Fred did but backwards in heels?

Kennedy: Yep.

Grace: Like, Sisko had to do everything that Kirk did but with a massive amount of trauma heaped on him, with a ton of Starfleet expectation heaped on him in an impossible situation. Making peace between-- trying to keep the peace between two previously warring factions. And it's just like, oh, my God, the guy cannot catch a break. The guy has to do so much more than any of these other guys who we see are captains from the very beginning. And if I can tangent for a second here, because this is a thing that I see come up every couple of years in talking about the biopic Oscar race when it inevitably comes up because this is my favorite example of it.

A while back, someone was like, "Okay, what does a black person have to do, what does any person of color have to do to make the Oscar voting audience feel like they deserve a biopic? What type of trauma do they have to go through?" I'm trying to remember the exact lineup of it, but it was something like, "Okay, so with *Hidden Figures*, people were saying that shouldn't be in the Oscars because, [onomatopoeia]." I don't know. But then we get a Oscar bait biopic about, I'm not making this shit up, the woman who invented the Swiffer, that justifies a biopic and all the buzz and everyone going like, "Oh, yeah, this is a great story that need to be told." You have to save the literal world to deserve a biopic if you are not a white person, because your story just needs to have this weird level of deserved. And that's what I always think of with this.

Kennedy: It's weird that white showrunners insist that their black characters earn the bare minimum of human decency and respect.

Grace: Yeah. And if I can bring it back to my Oscar metaphor real quick, because the queer community, we see a lot of queer tragedy movies come through for the Oscar bait, and very much those are not for the queer audience. They're very much about how, "Oh, look how they have suffered. Look, all the horrible things that they have went through." But it is almost exclusively the queer suffering stories that are the ones that are widely regarded and lauded and told specifically because they are not for a queer audience. They are for a straight audience to feel good about themselves by watching and being like, "Well, I showed these poor people empathy by watching their movie." And it's not that those stories of suffering are not important. Those are an extrinsic part of our history but at the same time, the fact that the only palatable version of them on a wide scale are the ones we are suffering in is very telling.

Kennedy: Yeah. All of that and then some. In fact, we're going to need to revisit literally everybody else in Trekkdom in a part II because this has been lengthy. We've had a lot to get

out of our systems, and I'm sure we have a lot more to say, and I'm sure that folks want to hear about it. So, if you would like to hear the rest of our analysis on back pain in *Star Trek*, please, please, please tune back in. But that is all the time we have today. Aliza, where can people find you on the internet?

Aliza: You can find me at Twitter, Instagram, Hive, Bluesky, literally all the things at [@AlizaPearl](#), and also on TikTok, [@therealalizapearl](#).

Kennedy: And Grace, where can people find you on the internet?

Grace: You can find me across social media [@BonecrusherJ](#) or [@BonecrusherJenk](#). And you can also find me getting ready for *Star Trek* Las Vegas, because hot damn, am I excited.

Aliza: Hachi machi.

Kennedy: Hachi machi.

Grace: I got a countdown going for it.

Kennedy: Nice. And if you want to hear more of my angry ramblings or my joyous wranglings, whichever you enjoy--

Grace: You do, trust us, you do.

Kennedy: [chuckles] You can find me on the internet, specifically Instagram and Twitter at [@thatmikeychick](#). But don't act up in my comments because I will drag you publicly and then block you. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit [womenatwarp.com](#), email us at [crew@womenatwarp.com](#) or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram [@womenatwarp](#). Thanks so much for listening and stay tuned for part II.

Aliza: Bye-bye.

[Women at Warp theme]

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