Michael Eure Show Podcast – Episode 19: Black Women and the 19th Amendment

INTRODUCTION
Hello, this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to the Michael Eure Show, featuring student hosts and very special guests talking about a variety of interes□ng topics. You can find this on the Eagle Stream YouTube channel.

MICHAEL EURE: Good a□ernoon, and welcome to the first episode of the Fall edi□on of the Michael Eure Show. Our special guest today is Dr. Joyce Russell, and I'm gonna let her tell you a litle bit about herself a□er I tell you a litle bit about what I know about.

She's an awesome scholar and English professor. She's taught women's literature at Fayeteville State, and she re□red from Fayeteville state. She teaches some classes at Saint Aug's, and she's worked at Saint Aug's before.

I love Dr. Russell because she knows a lot about history and par□cularly Anna J. Cooper, who is from Raleigh, North Carolina, and a graduate of Saint Augus□ne's and went to the Sorbonne to study and is credited with wri□ng a book called "A Voice from the South."

But let me right now turn it over to Dr. Russell. Tell us a litle bit about yourself and how did you get interested in becoming an English professor. A lot of people just wanna know what made that career path your desire?

JOYCE RUSSELL: Well, thank you, Mr. Eure, for having me. And I wanted to thank Wake Tech as well. Mr. Eure and I do go back quite a long way. We have worked on various projects together. Just a while ago, we were entertaining the idea of embarking on yet another project together.

But I have always loved to read. That is, un□l I became an English major, and then I became □red of it. No, not really. There's always so much to learn from books. This summer, I read about 10 books. I guess there's not much more to do because I can't get to the theater, which is another of my passions. Can't get to the movie house – another great passion. So, I have just taken to, or really con□nuing, my reading.

I got my bachelor's degree from Bennet College for women in Greensboro. I majored in English and minored in French. Then I became an Eagle – got my M.A. from North Carolina Central University, where I did a master's thesis on existen□alism in the works of Richard Wright. And then on to Emory University, where I majored in interdisciplinary studies, which combined English and philosophy. So, I did my disserta□on on W.E.B. Dubois and this phenomenon of double consciousness, which seems to be so much of a plague right now for us African Americans.

So, that's a bit about me, and I want to say that I am so honored to be here today to talk about Black women and the 19th Amendment.

Now, I'm going to tell you something about Mr. Eure, and he will support this. Mr. Eure contacted me less than 24 hours ago to ask if I would appear on this program, but this is what friends do for friends. So, I'm very happy. But I wanna tell Michael: Don't make a habit of this, OK? OK, but I'm so happy to be here.

Now, normally when I make a presentaon, I don't like to start with the takeaways. I like to give the takeaways at the end. But for reasons of me constraints, I'm going to tell you the takeaways now so that I will be sure to get them in.

Number one, first, takeaway, the 19th Amendment, which granted women the franchise, was rafied on August 18, 1920, which means that we just marked the centennial anniversary of that event.

Takeaway two, there were indeed Black suffragists, though some of the white suffragists did not welcome the involvement of the Black suffragists.

And takeaway three, I want you to remember a tle that Mr. Eure just referenced, "A Voice from the South, by Anna J. Cooper, and that book was published in 1892.

So, now I want to go back to Seneca Falls for one moment. That should be a locaon that is in your mind, OK? Seneca Falls, a hamlet in Seneca Falls County, New York. The first setlers arrived there in 1790. Seneca Falls was incorporated in 1831, and I like this one because I'm a movie buff – Seneca Falls was possibly the inspiraon for Frank Capra's film "It's a Wonderful Life." And Seneca Falls, the birthplace of the women's suffrage movement.

Many scholars and laypersons possessing knowledge of the long journey for women from Seneca Falls to the ballot box, those individuals are all very aware that the woman's rights convenon was held in Seneca Falls in 1848. That was the first women's rights convenon.

Similarly, many possess an awareness of the contribuons and dedicaon of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucrea Mot, and these were two of the primary organizers of the 1848 convenon.

I believe I mispronounced her name. I think most people say Elizabeth Cady Stanton. So, their names are imprinted on our collecve memory.

Now, what is not known by many is that the Seneca Falls Convenon of 1848 did not welcome the parcipaon of Black American women. Now, the only Black person at that convenon was Frederick Douglass. The only black person, man or woman. Now, he was, in fact, Douglass was, one of the first of the 32 men who signed the Declaraon of Rights and Senments, the document which Douglass would later refer to as the document that ignited the grand movement for ataining the civil, social, religious and polical rights of women.

Now, to some of you, it may be astonishing that no African American women were present at that convenon, for certainly women of color were residing in the North at the me of the convenon, among them Maria Stewart, who was a lecturer and abolionist, women's rights advocate. Stewart wasn't fact the first African American to lecture about women's rights in a lecture which she delivered in 1832 in Boston. She demanded equal rights for all women, but especially for Black women.

Now, the queson here that may arise is this: If there were arculate Black women in the North who were the intellectual equals of their Caucasian sisters, why then were they excluded from the Seneca

Falls Conven□on of 1848? While we might speculate that, in the mid-19th century, most of the poli□cally involved white women were so busy with their aboli□onist work that they were simply not inclined to look at Black women as ones who could contribute to the cause of women's suffrage, most of the early suffragists who themselves were aboli□onists employed the strategies of the aboli□onists in their own struggle for enfranchisement.

Now, there came a □me, and there was a desire to merge the aboli□onist movement with the suffragist movement. Now, on the idea of merger, some women, some of those white women, were opposed to that idea. Some were for it, but this agreement caused a fissure in the en□re movement, causing some women to actually leave the organiza□on and to make their own statement – but le□ the organiza□on en□rely, but con□nue to work under another umbrella.

Now, the problem for Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others was that, well, white women, they felt were being subordinated to Black men. Now, at this point, we might need to say a bit about the 15th Amendment because the 15th Amendment actually gave the vote to Black men. Now, that enraged some of the white suffragists. As we would say in my home state of Virginia, those white women had a connip□on. They did not want that to occur.

So, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as I said, was very opposed to that amendment. And she believed that Black women, I'm sorry, that white women should not be subordinated to Black men, and Susan B. Anthony was really not a lot beter. Although we some□mes like to think that she was a litle bit beter, but she was not. They were of the same ilk. They believed that it just wasn't the proper thing to do, and all these ideas can be atributed to racism, I would think.

Susan B. Anthony even declared once to Frederick Douglass that “I will,” this is a quote, she said, “I will cut off this right arm of mine before I ask for the ballot for the Negro and not the woman.” So, there was quite a bit of racism associated with that movement, as you can tell.

All right. Now, I would like, at this □me, to li□ up the name of Fannie Lou Hamer. Any□me I have the opportunity, I do so gladly. You probably are familiar with Fannie Lou Hamer. If not, then you really should learn about her.

Fannie Lou Hamer lived between the years 1917 and 1977. She was an ac□vist who was beaten and permanently impaired all because she wanted the right to vote. So, I am dedica□ng these remarks to the memory of Fannie Lou Hamer and also to the memory of Congressman John Lewis.

Now, returning to the 19th Amendment. When the 19th Amendment was passed, I want you to think about this for a moment: Ask yourselves, do you think that the Black women actually exercised the franchise? The answer is no, although legally they had the right to vote.

You have to remember that states enacted laws that would prohibit the vo□ng right or prohibi□ng Blacks from cas□ng ballots. Again, in my home state of Virginia, for example, and many other states – I've talked about Virginia because it is my home state – I know that poll taxes were enacted. I'm not so sure I

remember the literary tests that were common in so many of the other places, but I do know that poll taxes were enacted to restrict the vo□ng.

But in spite of those restric□ons that were put in place in the Commonwealth of Virginia, there were two members of my family who always managed to vote in every elec□on. Now, my cogni□on begins with, oh, I guess the age of 4, and for as long as I can remember, my maternal grandfather, William T. Russell, and my mother, Annie Alexander Russell, always voted in every elec□on.

So, when I cast my ballot, I always do so in their honor. I call their names and say, “Grandpa, Mom, I'm cas□ng this ballot in your honor.” I'm very proud of that because, to my recollec□on, they were the only two African Americans who were voters in my small town of Palmer Springs, Virginia.

Now, returning to our focus on Black suffragists, I do want to remind you again that there were Black suffragists, but they were not welcomed into that suffragist movement. There was so much, so many vitriolic voices, and you already heard one in this case, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. But there were others, and I men□oned Susan B. Anthony, and to me, it is a bit strange that these individuals, these two women, whom we regard as leaders of women's enfranchisement, that they were, in fact, really so racist and their views caused so many to succumb to the wishes, the desires of white supremacists.

So, ge□ng back to the 15th Amendment – I'm jumping all over the place, but I wanted to interject that about these two women – but I wanted to say that, or add rather, with the passing of the 15th Amendment, which allowed Black men to vote, Elizabeth Cady Stanton even resorted to name calling. She called Black Men who were to be voters, she called them – I hate to say this, but she called them “Sambos” and “rapists.” This is the kind of language that ensued from these women who we regard as great women in the suffrage movement. Not to give the impression that all of the suffragists were like that, because certainly they were not, but these were the leaders whom we have learned about through the years.

And let us men□on that Ida B. Wells, a Black suffragist, was very prominent in the movement. Ida B. Wells founded what was known as the Alpha Suffrage Club, and she founded that in 1913, in that same year, 1913, that suffragists from around the na□on were planning a march in Washington, D.C., and they planned that march on the day before the inaugura□on of President Woodrow Wilson.

Now, all of these suffragists had gathered, and the Black suffragists arrived, planning to par□cipate in the parade. When they arrived, they were told that they could march only if they got at the end of the line. So, they had to posi□on themselves or were told to posi□on themselves at the end of the parade route.

Now, Ida B. Wells was represen□ng the Illinois delega□on, and she wanted to march with the suffragists from, the white suffragists from, the Illinois delega□on. But she was told, “No, you can't do that.” So, Ida B. Wells, being who Ida B. Wells was, she waited un□l the Illinois delega□on came by, and she jumped right in with them and marched in the parade in spite of their protest.

So, that's Ida B. Wells for you, and she certainly is one of my she-roes.

Now, I want to men□on also that one of the chief organizers of that parade was a woman by the name of Alice Paul. And she staunchly protested, saying that she would not march beside any Black woman. So, you can see how the tone was and how Black women were rejected and somehow betrayed with regard to the suffragist movement.

Now, other Black suffragists, included Frances Watkins Harper – you would know her from literary fame; she was a poet in addi□on to being an ac□vist and novelist as well. You probably know the name Mary Church Terrell. Maybe you know Nanny Helen Burroughs. There were many. And we come to our beloved Anna J. Cooper, whose "A Voice from the South" was men□oned before.

We know that Anna J. Cooper actually fought to have women earn the right to vote or be given the right to vote. She organized, she among others organized, a club called the Colored Women's League. It was organized in Washington, D.C., and the first members were Anna J. Cooper, Helen Cook, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells, Charlote Horton, who later became Charlote Horton Grim Kay.

Now, Cooper is certainly a star of the Black women's club movement, which I've not said a lot about, but I do want to pause here to say that the Black women's club movement of the late 19th century was very, very instrumental in poli□cal upli□ and racial upli□, social jus□ce. They had the moto "li□ing as we climb," and they were very interested in community upli□ and upli□ing the en□re race, and they wanted equality for all.

So, I want to suggest too that we who live in the 21st century are s□ll benefi□ng from the work of those women in the club movement of the late 19th century. I've belonged to a number of organiza□ons, clubs (indecipherable) is one of them. We are a service organiza□on. We do a lot of community work. I'm also a member of the Na□onal Council of Negro Women, and I'm sure you remember many such organiza□ons in our churches. We have missionary circles, all for the beterment, the improvement of are people.

Not to forget our sorori□es. We must remember our sorori□es, and if my memory serves me correctly,I believe that the Deltas, Delta Sigma Theta, I believe that they par□cipated in that march with the suffragists in 1913.

So, let me con□nue by men□oning again that Anna J. Cooper really is a star, a star of the club movement, a star of Raleigh, North Carolina. I've visited her res□ng place several □mes. She's very just a few miles, maybe a couple of miles in the city cemetery from Saint Augus□ne's University.

She's a star of Raleigh because another reason, you know, we remember her. There is a monument in her honor at the corner of Edenton Street and East Street. I was there, happy to say, on the day that that monument was erected, and I'm also happy to say that I gave the address that kicked off that whole day of celebra□on for Anna J. Cooper and was there when the monument, the street monument, was erected.

So, she is a star of Saint Augus□ne's University, where she received her early educa□on. And, of course, she is a star for all feminists and certainly womanist scholars. When we use the term womanist scholars,

we more than likely are referring to, all the ⁇me, we're referring to Black women who embraced the boldness and embraced the work ethic and the family ideals and all the principles of being a Black woman. We embrace the idea of s⁇ck-to-i⁇veness. We embrace the idea of making ways out of no ways. So, Anna J. Cooper certainly is another of my she-roes.

I knew a gentleman many years ago, and Mr. Eure would probably know Dr. Boyer as well. Dr. Boyer knew Anna J. Cooper, and Dr. Boyer told me that he interviewed her. And by the way, listeners, she passed away at the age of 104, 105, something like that, and she was memorialized in the Saint Augus⁇ne's Chapel. I have been searching a very long ⁇me to find a funeral program for Anna J. Cooper. Can't find it anywhere. I've looked at the archives on the campus, can't find it anywhere. So, if anybody has anything like that, let me know, please, if you have that program.

In closing, I want to say that, if you have your passport, I'm giving you a homework assignment. I want you to look at your passport? You'll see, on the pages you'll see, quota⁇ons by 13 individuals in your passport. All 13 of these quota⁇ons, most of them rather, are by men. Twelve are by men, one is by a woman, and that quota⁇on is by Anna J. Cooper, a quota⁇on that appears in her book "A Voice from the South." The quota⁇on reads, "The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or class. It is the cause of humankind and every birthright of humanity."

So, I close with that, and I hope that you will do your homework assignment and see for yourself this quota⁇on that Anna J. Cooper has in this, that they, that has been included here in the pastport, the American passport, U.S. passport.

Thank you so much. And now I think I need to throw this back to Mr. Eure.

EURE: Well, thank you, Dr. Russell, and we have some ques⁇ons and comments at this point. We have about six minutes.

So, Anisha Stewart, who you probably know, is a graduate of Saint Augus⁇ne's, says hello.

RUSSELL: Well, hello, Ms. Stewart. It's very nice to know that you are out there. I hope you're doing well. Thank you so much.

EURE: So, Josie George wants to know what year or years did your mother and grandfather start vo⁇ng?

RUSSELL: My grandfather started vo⁇ng really before I was 4 years of age, but I do remember that he voted in, I believe it was, I remember the elec⁇on of 19--, think it must have been, I don't know, but it was a year that I can't recall now, but it was the year that Goldwater campaigned, and up un⁇l that ⁇me, my grandfather had always voted the Republican ⁇cket. But the year that Barry Goldwater ran, he changed his party affilia⁇on for obvious reasons – if you know anything about Barry Goldwater in history – and he became a Democrat at that ⁇me.

My grandfather embraced the Republican Party because he always said that the Republican Party is the party of Lincoln, and Lincoln freed the slaves. Yeah, that did work for Grandpa up un⁇l ⁇mes really did

change, and the Republican Party, or the Democra□c Party became the Dixiecrats, and all those kinds of things. So, he really was a man of good judgment and had a very good poli□cal mind.

My mother, I remember that she voted in, surely I remember that she voted in the Kennedy-Nixon elec□on. I remember that she always was a Democrat.

EURE: Doctor, Chris (indecipherable), the head of our Engineering Department, says thanks for sharing, Dr. Russell. I'm always surprised and very humbled to know that there is s□ll a lot of Black history that I'm s□ll ge□ng exposed to, and I believe what you've shared.

RUSSELL: Thank you so much for that. There is just so much more that we could go into. I want to say that, when Mr. Eure and I first met, we were ac□vely involved in the Anna J. Cooper Society, which existed on Saint Augus□ne's campus, and through the years, we let that go away. But we want to resurrect that society.

Anna J. Cooper is such a phenomenal figure. I learned just recently that, in Washington, D.C., of course, she lived there for a number of years, in Washington, D.C., there is a circle and a very exclusive area called (indecipherable) Circle, I believe it is, or (indecipherable) Place, and the circle is called Anna J. Cooper Circle, and homes there go for $1.5 million. So, I'm just amazed at how many people around the world, around the country, know Anna J. Cooper and li□ up her work.

EURE: Do you know anything about her studying in France?

RUSSELL: Oh, Anna J. Cooper was such an educated, had such a mind for educa□ng herself and educa□ng others. Yes, Anna J. Cooper did study at Saint Augus□ne's. She went to Oberlin University, but I think that – all those are big things, all of these are great accomplishments – but to go to the Sorbonne and write your disserta□on in French and to get awarded a Ph.D. at the age of 66, that's a piece of history worth knowing.

EURE: And now Chris has another. He says knowing the rich history and sta□s□cs, do you think Blacks, especially women today, understand the importance of vo□ng? And do you think the numbers have gone up?

RUSSELL: I certainly do think that Black women know the importance of vo□ng. Again, I'm going to be anecdotal for a moment. There was a woman in my hometown. My hometown is very, very small, but this young woman unfortunately, unfortunately she was not able to read and write, but that does not mean that she was not aware. She registered to vote for the very first □me when Obama ran. She said to my mother, because she knew my mother was an ac□vist and all, she said, "Miss Aun□e Pearl, I want you to help me. I'm going to register to vote. I'm going to vote this □me." So, not to imply that Rosa was not a smart woman. She was very smart. She just was not a letered woman, but she voted, and I think that we all know the importance of vo□ng now, and certainly we want to encourage all people to vote and especially Black women, because we know what has gone before, the rough road that we have had to travel to get recogni□on and to get the franchise. So, I certainly think that more and more people are vo□ng.

EURE: Ranisha says such necessary informa□on. Thank you.

RUSSELL: Well, I thank you, and I always like to say that, OK, I teach, I write, I'm a researcher, but every teacher is a student, and every student is a teacher. So, I always learn from persons that I'm addressing. I learn from students, and the minute we stop learning, that's the minute we may as well pack it all in. But I am a lifelong learner.

EURE: David Pollard, he's from Winston-Salem State, a graduate of A&T and a chemist, he wants to know – and I would like to say he's a Raleigh resident, a Raleigh na□ve – I would like to say for any of them of this type, I listened, and I learned. Thank you.

RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Pollard. I certainly appreciate that.

EURE: And Chris□e Shields, our director of student ac□vi□es at Wake Tech, where can we hear more on this topic?

RUSSELL: Well, there are a number of books coming out. One is, it may already be out, I can't remember the author's name, but I'm sure if you conduct a search with the word "Vanguard," I think that's the first word in the □tle. Can't remember the author, but I think this book came out in 2013. Vanguard, and I also recommend, I don't have the book before me, but there is a great book that was published many years ago by I believe the woman's last name is Hutchinson, and it is called "Anna J. Cooper." Very handsome book and full of informa□on. So, there are a sources out there, and it is surprising to me that there are journalists who in their columns are now wri□ng about, well, Black women suffragists, and I've come across a few recently that really highlight Anna J. Cooper, and some have remarked that her book "A Voice from the South" is really, and I agree, a germinal text that laid the groundwork for those of us who work in feminist studies and womanist studies. So, there's quite a bit out there.

EURE: So, there's a lot of people that want to know how can they get in touch with you if they want to follow up? And perhaps some professors may want you to come talk to their classes. Who knows? But do you have contact informa□on that you can share?

RUSSELL: Well, I must say that I am old school. I don't do any twitering. I don't. do any snapcha□ng. I do have a Twiter page, but I'm there only to read what others have writen. But the best contact informa□on for me is jarussell@st-aug.edu, and I shall respond promptly.

EURE: Well, thank you and thank you for coming. And your final thoughts in this current state. I mean, we're all in this pandemic mode, but we're also trying to get ready to vote. What do you think about the vice presiden□al on the Democra□c side, Kamala? And what do you think about the urban, suburban white women and men, and this seemingly new coali□on that has part itself about?

RUSSELL: Well, I'd like to start by saying that I do not honor the term alt-right. I've heard that expression used some of the □me, and I prefer not to even use that expression because o□en it is used in connec□on with the Republican Party, and I have to say that the Republican Party that exists today is not

the Republican Party that my grandfather grew up with or the Republican Party that I knew in the past. So, I would say that it is important to study the candidates. It's important to listen to the news, regardless of what others are saying, but you have to really use your intellect. You have to use your third ear, your third eye, and you have to be a voter, you have to be a par□cipant. And I would say too that we all can stand a review in civics.

I heard recently – although I have re□red from really watching the news, I can't help but see these news bites when I turn on my devices – I see these news bites, and I heard today that President Trump was in the area, sort of encouraging people to break the law by vo□ng twice. He said to send in your mail-in ballot and then go to the polls to vote. Now, we cannot condone anything like that because that is really breaking the law.

So, I want us all to know that this really is a very important elec□on. I want us all to know that we should vote early if possible, but safely, and I want you to know that America is at a crossroad, and although we are, and with regard to the pandemic, we are in COVID-19. But I've heard others say that we also have the pandemic of COVID-1619, which means that we are experiencing s□ll the racism, the fallout, the Oppression, the mistreatment that arose when Black people were first brought to this country.

So, we have two pandemics, the pandemic of COVID-19, the pandemic of 1619.

EURE: All right, and thank you again audience. Oh, Diana Grigsby, professor from Saint Aug's, your discussion was very enlightening. Thank you.

RUSSELL: Thank you, Dr. Grigsby. Thank you.

EURE: OK, so we're gonna have to go, even though we've enjoyed you so much, and if anybody has friends that you want to share this with, it will be on YouTube this evening on the Wake Tech Eagle Stream channel, where you can just type in Michael Eure, and the show is the first and third Thursday of the month, and it's from 12 to 12:30. We went a litle bit over, but that's just because people were interested.

So, we'll see you next □me, and Dr. Russell, thank you again, and we hope that we can bring you back.

RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Eure. I really enjoyed it, and we'll talk again soon. Goodbye.