

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 our variety of interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube channel.

MICHAEL EURE: All right. Good afternoon. Welcome to the Michael show.

Today we have a very special Guest, Keith Knight and we have two student cohosts, Daniel Blake and Jerry Greene.

And right now, we're gonna just start with maybe ten seconds, y'all can introduce yourself and we'll start with the students.

And then we'll go to Keith.

DANIEL BLAKE: Oh, hi, I'm Daniel Blake. I'm a first-semester student here at Wake Tech. Really looking forward to the day and talk to you, Keith.

JERRY GREENE: Hi, my name is Jerry Greene. I'm about to be a third-year student here at Wake Tech. I'm a cybersecurity major.

KEITH KNIGHT: And I'm Keith Knight, gentlemen, cartoonist and the co-creator of the Hulu Show "Woke."

EURE: Alright, and for the audience we're gonna have a great time today.

And Sarah, you don't mind, you can put Mr Knight's website in the chat window for the audience if you wanna learn more about them or order some of his panels or books.

And I must say, I ordered some. I'm excited.

So, we got a great, great, great show going on.

And so I'm gonna ask do any of the students want to start asking questions. Or would you like me to start?

BLAKE: Yeah, sure. I'll go ahead.

So, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself? Your background and a little bit about what you do.

KNIGHT: Well, I am a syndicated, nationally syndicated cartoonist as I've been doing that for almost three decades. I grew up in Boston, MA, and I had always drawn as a kid.

Umm, and it wasn't until I was in junior high, I started to do autobiographical comic strips. So, just stuff about things that happen to me and my friends.

And I got into the school newsletter and then I got into my high school newspaper, and then I got into my college newspaper.

And then when I graduated and moved to San Francisco, that's when I first started getting into the alternative weekly market and it just grew from there.

And uh, yeah, it's really all I've ever done my whole life. It's been rather boring, but I've just drawn cartoons.

EURE: Do you have a question of Jerry?

GREENE: What made or helped shape your focus on the type of messages expressed in your current works?

KNIGHT: Well, you know, it was a really cool moment and when I was in college, I had my first black teacher in college.

I didn't have any black teachers except for the occasional substitute teacher. But my first black teacher, I was a junior in college and he was an American literature teacher, and that American literature teacher assigned us writers like Richard Wright Ralph Bellison, Maya Angelou and James Baldwin.

And then when someone said, why are you giving us all black writers? He said I'm giving you all American writers and that sort of blew my mind because we're taught in school that American literature is Mark Twain. You know, we have a very limited, we are taught a very limited range of what American writing could be.

So, that just opened everything up. And my autobiographical comics went from being about keg parties to being what it's like to be a black man growing up in America.

EURE: Alright.

And I'm gonna remind the audience again if you have questions ask them in the chat.

But Keith, tell me a little bit about your growing up. Where you in Massachusetts and then wound up in California, and now you're in North Carolina? How were those transitions? How different were the different areas?

KNIGHT: Well, you know, when you grow up someplace, you don't know any different, right?

So, Boston is its own, it's very interesting.

Boston's a very interesting place because Boston, the city is actually majority minority. There are more people of color living in Boston than white people, and you would never know this through the way it's depicted, right?

You think of Boston and all you think of is Irish and then, you know, Ben Affleck and Marky Mark and all this stuff.

But so I just grew up in this uh working class town, very working class town. And I honestly believe I that I was gonna, I was just gonna live there forever and it wasn't till I went to school and stayed on campus that I realized, oh my God... like, I can't believe that, you know, you just start to sort of grow as you move away and you meet other people from different places.

And then I worked in Fanueil Hall in Boston drawing caricatures during the summer.

So, and that's where I met tourists from all over the world, that's what I realized that the Boston accent is the worst accent in the world. So, I got rid of that really quickly.

But I met folks, uh, and one of my coworkers went to San Francisco because he go to do all the good jobs and he could draw well.

And he's just said you gonna go to San Francisco. It's like a big Harvard square, you gotta go there.

So, when I graduated school, I just jumped in a car, sight unseen, drove to San Francisco and fell in love with it. Stayed there for 16 years. I saw it as my graduate school, honestly.

Just... it was just after the earthquake of '89 and so rent was cheap. People were running away. The best time to move to San Francisco is after an earthquake.

If there's anything you take from this education, go after the earthquake, the next earthquake.

But it was just a great place to learn as an artist, and the, you know, the every, a lot of people are activists and I've learned a lot about politics and, and plus you could do comics about a lot of other things.

And it wasn't, you weren't tied into the daily comics, so you could read about all this stuff. So, I was doing reviews of concerts and shows.

I was, I mean, frankly, I was doing a lot of stuff about cannabis legalization in like 1992. You know, stuff like that. And it was just an amazing experience. Uh San Francisco was really an amazing experience.

And then after 16 years of that, I moved down to LA to develop my comic into a television show because the industry was going away. The tech industry was destroying... the Internet was destroying the newspaper industry and, you know, I, we put up with the LA for as long as we could. And then we moved to North Carolina. So, here we are.

EURE: Well, at this point, we're gonna look at one of your works.

If Sarah can put up panel #1, just move us to the side and tell us about that.

We found it interesting, the students and I thought this would be good for you to talk about. What went through your mind, how did you come up with this?

KNIGHT: Well, you know, I was doing a series of childhood games that we that we play.

Umm, but you know, I was doing a racial take on it, so I was doing Chutes and Ladders.

And I remember I spoke spelled shoots SHOOTS and I had lots of chutes and a lot of broken ladders. I was trying to show how hard it is to kind of get ahead in this country as person of color.

This one obviously is the tape on Operation, the childhood, the Operation. And so I just redrew the guy as a black man. And just talked about, you know, obviously the things that plague us that racism sort of, you know, suddenly, not so suddenly affect us.

And so I had hypertension and asthma, environmental racism, mental health issues like, you know, to be even slightly conscious in this world today is to just be extremely to take a James Baldwin quote, is to be angry all the time.

Diabetes emasculation, PTSD, all of it. And what else do I do?

I did Candyland to address the food deserts that happen in black communities. And I also did Monopoly and the Monopoly was really interesting. And and I talk about this during my racial-literacy slideshow.

It's a great way to get people to understand a little bit about how, how racism, how this system that we grew up in works.

Uh, so I just say like, if you're white and you walk into a room and you see a bunch of black people playing Monopoly for the past three hours and they turned and they go, do you wanna play?

And uh and and the white people are like, yeah, but like you own all the hotels and all the railroads and all this, you know, you have all this money and the black people turn and go, we're going to give you 200 bucks. Like I started out with 200 bucks. You know you're gonna have 200 bucks, what's the problem?

Like, that's what America is. You know, America was built on the on the backs of people that weren't considered human.

And then this country is built up, you know? Like what could you build if you had 300-plus years of free labor? Like you tell me that three, over three centuries of free labor. What could you build?

And then you turn around and say uh, 200 bucks, here you go.

So, it's a good way to get people to understand sort of how hardcore the situation we find ourselves in and it's not gonna be just like, oh, we voted a black president and everything fine now.

EURE: Okay. And we're gonna... actually let me asks the student do you have any other questions?

BLAKE: I was going to ask, cause your work has such a beautiful look into a different lens that I don't think often people get to look at.

So, could you give us maybe off the top of your head some of your favorite examples of some comics that you have done in the past?

KNIGHT: Oh wow, uh... It's been a long career.

I can only think of stuff that, off the top of my head, that I think about that maybe I said you guys already. There's a strip that I did about "all lives matter" the asterisks uh you know "restrictions apply see skin color for details."

I think my favorite ones are the ones that I just know that send, they use metaphor, they use something that you're all familiar with. You know, everybody knows the fine print at the bottom of everything. So, I thought that was a good take and that's something I use in my slideshows.

I also really enjoy the portraiture that I started doing. And it's the portraits that I do are of folks that influenced me in my life, somehow, someway.

That's Colin Kaepernick there. Uh, I think I sent you a few more. Yeah, Maya Angelou is one of my favorite ones.

I got to meet Maya Angelou in San Francisco when I was living there and it was the closest thing, it felt, to meeting royalty. So, it's pretty, pretty amazing.

And my twin sister was very jealous. Muhammad Ali, who you know was Colin Kaepernick, before Colin Kaepernick.

And so many people, and of a certain age. Uh, you know, know that Mohammed Ali stood up for stuff and was arrested and was not going to go and fight a war for this country that treats its black citizens like, you know, 4th class citizens. And he stood up for it.

And he became a beloved icon and uh, you know, I fully expect that Colin Kaepernick's gonna be treated the same way when he's older.

Here's the thing, black people in this country get credit, you know, 50 years down the line.

But everything that's happening today expect an apology 50 years from now, I promise.

That's what's gonna happen, Shirley Chisholm. You know, they're gonna make a film out of her of her story.

It's coming out very soon, but that's another person that I used to see when I was a kid and just be like, yeah, yeah, she's really cool.

And then John Lewis, John Lewis is like that perfect, sort of... meeting of what I do, which is the activism in the comics because he got into activism by reading a Martin Luther King comment when he was a kid. That's how what attracted him to the cause.

And so, for him to grow up and, you know, become this icon and then create these graphic novels about his story, which are the March graphic novels and then for him to go to Comic Con where, you know, where I would be. And he would dress up as his younger self, like with the backpack and the trench coat and walk through the Con with all these kids following him. And it was just an amazing sight to see.

So, uh, I really that really dig the, so the history and I'm glad I was able to do a half-decent drawing of him.

EURE: Thank you, Sarah... You are so efficient.

I appreciate it and it's easy when we have a person like Keith Knight.

So, Jerry, do you have a question that you would like to ask? Go ahead.

GREENE: I really wanna ask about the way you transform everyday objects such as trash cans on your Hulu show, Woke. It works really well in your storytelling.

Wanna talk about, can you give us some insight and how you go about developing characters and if you infusing them in the storyline?

KNIGHT: Yeah. Well, you know Woke came about when I moved down to Los Angeles and wanted to come up with a, you know, I wanted, I've always wanted to do a TV show and so, uh, I was lucky enough to meet a producer who who's really digging my stuff. And he says, like, just totally love your voice. Let's try to get it by some people.

And we got it in front of some of the right people and uh, they matched me up since I was inexperienced as a writer in Hollywood. They matched me up with the more experienced writer in Marshall Todd. He was, he co-wrote the first Barbershop movie.

And we both sort of, sort of bonded over our mutual uh police, uh profiling incidents we both were profiled by the police, which happens to every black man at some point.

And we were talking about, OK, like, what if, you know, he has this traumatizing incident with the police and then the character, you know, because he's a cartoonist, his inanimate objects come to life because we didn't want it, we wanted to do a show about our cartoonist, but we didn't want everybody sitting around. We didn't want him just sitting around drawing all the time. Like, we wanted to show it somehow, some way that was gonna be dynamic and interesting.

And this picture, by the way, is I played a the the koala in that episode, I got to dress up as koala and punch my character.

Anyway, so, we thought, okay, how could we use the same animations in the show and have them speak truth the power, or just make the comment about something that would fit that character.

So, we're like, OK, the trash can sitting out in front of a Barber shop, he could witness the neighborhood being gentrified and changing. So, we thought that was an interesting idea.

The 40s, the 40-ounce malt-liquor bottles. You know, they could be the ones like, hey, we're here. You know, for you to drown your sorrows and the traumatizing events that happened in your life, you know?

Uh, one of my favorite ones was the paper bag in episode 5. Because there was a real paper bag test back in the day where if your skin was darker than the paper bag, like if your skin was lighter than the paper bag you get you get, you'd be more accepted by white society then if you were darker than the paper bag. So, the paper bag test to me it was me, I think the most effective one and my favorite one.

But you know, it's just sort of looking through and finding that opportunity... okay, what can we say with this character that would sound silly and preachy, coming out of a human character, but it would be perfect for an animated character?

So, that's what we're trying to do. That's...

EURE: Okay.

KNIGHT: I'm sorry.

EURE: No. The brown paper bag was interesting because New Orleans gets the credit for it, but it's throughout the world. It's not just there. So, I thank you for bringing that concept to life.

KNIGHT: Yeah. Yeah.

And that picture up there is Mo Marable. The guy in the glasses. He's the director and he's the one who had the idea of making the objects, uh, like puppetry and like real stuff instead of flat 2-D animation. And I think that was super important. I think that really made, elevated the project and made it really cool.

So, but yeah, Gunther and Clovis, are played by T Murph and Blake Anderson. So, really fun. They're really fun guys.

Oh and that's me behind the scenes with Blake.

I couldn't see anything with the head on, so I only put the head on right when I had to put the head on.

EURE: Is it hot, that uniform, that outfit?

KNIGHT: Well, you know, we shot the show in Vancouver, BC in January, and February of 2020, so it snowed or rained 32 straight days. So, uh, it was certainly not too hot at all.

In fact, I got to stay dry and there was someone standing, it was raining and I remember someone just standing next to me with an umbrella the whole time between takes.

EURE: Well, Daniel and Jerry, do you have any other questions?

Because we're down, we have 8 minutes left. If you have anything on your mind or you want comment based on what you just heard and saw?

BLAKE: Yeah, I'd love to ask a question because when you were talking about some of your favorite panels, you mentioned how you felt when you met Maya Angelou, how it felt like you're speaking to royalty or as close as it could be. And how you look up to these different figures. John Lewis, Mohammad Ali. You know, Angelou again.

Sorry, but I wanted to ask to maybe get your perspective on uh, how you feel you have made an impact and if you think that you're doing what you truly want to do and impacting the world and the way you want to? And maybe causing some younger black men to look up to you as well, just like you did to them.

KNIGHT: Umm I hope so. I mean, I, you know, I hesitate to say that I'm an activist. I'm just doing what I've always wanted to do. And if it means that I'm turning people on to ideas or personalities or figures that takes them on a journey to learn about them, then I'm psyched.



And, you know, not just, you know, young black men, but everybody. Because I think everybody needs to learn this stuff if we are to move forward as a country.

Umm, everybody needs to understand how this country was founded and the system that keep, sort of, that allow police to do what they do to allow people to go to jail for as long as they go for. And for people to sit on death row and then have college students, you know, prove that they were innocent and get them off, you know, and really is, you know, if the death penalty was actually fair then there maybe that you know, you could make an argument for it, but it's all based on... if you have money, you will never go to Death Row.

And there's just so much of that stuff that's going on. I mean we, you know, the south itself, doubled down, tripled down on slavery.

They didn't have any, they had no Plan B. There wasn't like, okay, if we lose the Civil War we'll just transition, you know, it was essentially all or nothing. And slavery was outlawed after the Civil War.

Unless it was as punishment for prison. Uh, or prison sentence. So, what you gonna do is put a lot of black folks in jail and that's where we are today.

Like, honestly, umm it's, there's so much that we don't learn. We learn fairy tales of pilgrims being friendly to Native Americans.

We, uh, Christopher Columbus, in his own words, was, an a-hole. And he writes it in his own words. And we should not be celebrating him. I just...

EURE: [inaudible]

KNIGHT: Say that again.

EURE: No, no. I was gonna say we know and we talked about this yesterday, that we're gonna have to have a part 2 with you. We already knew that.

But we have some questions in the chat and want to get to them, if that's alright.

KNIGHT: Oh yeah sure.

EURE: Alright, yeah, this is from Dr. Christopher O'Riordan-Adjah, the head of Wake Tech Engineering department. Can you read that for us Jerry?

GREENE: Chris said love this Chronicles, Is it a compilation?

KNIGHT: Ohh well, the K Chronicles, there's a number of different books that collect my comments, and you can buy them on my website.

There's also a big gigantic book which I don't sell, but it's it's a 500-page book, the K Chronicles Compilation that compiles my first four books, I think, but there's about seven or eight books, so there's plenty of other things out there.

But yeah, it's and I continue to do the to the K Chronicles every week on my website, on my Patreon website.

So, you can find me on Patreon and subscribe to that.

EURE: Alright, the next question, this comes from Latonya Parsons and she's the coordinator of Wake Tech's student money management department.

You got that, Daniel?

BLAKE: Yeah.

So, she asked what has been the one, what has been one of the most life-changing projects that you worked on?

KNIGHT: Well, I mean, I would say the TV show, I mean because it's like, you know, you know there's only a small segment population that still reads comic strips. It's especially newspaper comic strips like essentially no one under 50 read my stuff.

But like you guys would have never interviewed me unless I made a TV show.

So, that's been really interesting and just, you know, as a cartoonist, as any artist, you, you basically live in poverty for a very long time. So, you know, it's nice to have made some money from the show.

And yeah, it's it's amazing the weight that's lifted off you when you don't have to, you know, worry about where your next check is gonna come from. And that's my argument for a universal basic income.

EURE: Okay, and this is from Angela Torres.

I'm not sure who she is, but she got a good question and so it's time for you again, Jerry.

GREENE: This is awesome material. What advice would you give to the students in the interview?

KNIGHT: Uh to you students? Uh, I would just say, you know, don't believe everything you're taught in school. That's one thing I would say. And don't, make sure you tell your story.

It's important to tell your story, because if you don't tell your story, then other people will instead, and they'll get it wrong.

Do you ever notice how there's always these stories about millennials are destroying this, millennials are just entitled and this and that. Those are written by people my age or older that are jealous and angry about being old. So, tell your story and that's super important.

And here's the other thing I would say this too, to not be afraid to fail. Failure teaches you a lot, and so it's the failure, is being, it's not doing something because you are afraid to do it.

EURE: Alright.

Did you have some more?

KNIGHT: Uh, I was just gonna say that like you will if you don't do it because you're afraid you will regret it for the rest of your life. Whereas if you do it and it crashes and burns, at least you got a cool story to tell. Remember when I tried that? Yeah, but didn't work out very well, you know, don't be afraid to fail.

EURE: Alright, well, we're getting ready to wind down with to the last minute.

So, we're gonna ask Daniel, Jerry, give us the a quick closing and then Keith, you get the last word.

BLAKE: Well, again, I'd really like to thank you for coming on today. I think you provide such a wonderful lens on not only your life, but the general like American experience. And I think it was awesome to hear from you. So, thank you once again.

KNIGHT: Thank you.

GREEN: I really appreciate the insight that you gave to us and the people watching today.

So, the last question. I really appreciate you know, the advice. You know, tell your own story. Don't let anybody else tell you your own story. That's something good to live on.

EURE: And, before you talk, Keith... we do have one last question.

Okay.

Maria Zigler.

Can you describe your creative process?

KNIGHT: Ohh wow, it really is just, I take a notebook with me all the time.

I have a notebook and there's one right here and umm, I just doodle in it all the time.

And so, let's see if, this is pretty new, so, I don't have a whole lot. I doodle and I write in it. Can you see? It's hard to see. There's a little bit of drawing.

Oh, but I'm writing ideas and drawing all the time and then I just sort of formulate these comics and it's the same thing with the writing process.

I'm working on my outline now for my episode in Season 2, and I'm always just jotting down ideas going, oh that would be a good line to say or take a good way to do things.

But it's always good to carry it, and if you don't have a notebook, you can always say something into your phone.

EURE: And I did wanna bring up that we're gonna have you back and hopefully we'll have you here in person as the pandemic goes away. And we can get you to a couple of Wake Tech campuses. At least I'm gonna always advocate for the Scott Northern Wake Campus, because that's where I'm at.

But we know if you come to North, you gotta go to South.

We have a Southern Wake Campus as well.

KNIGHT: How many? How many?

EURE: We have ten campuses.

KNIGHT: Ten campuses!

EURE: Wake Tech, I'll have to give you the good story.

Wake Tech is the largest Community College in North Carolina.

KNIGHT: Excellent.

EURE: We have 23,000 students, and we are the number one online community college in the United States.

So, we're excited and I wanted to ask you if you could say your website because some of the people can't see this and they can only hear it.

So, we do actually say it, if they want to order or look you up.

KNIGHT: Sure, sure. Well, there's my website [keithnightart.com](http://keithnightart.com).

And if you wanna subscribe to my work every week, it's [www.patreon.com/keefknight](http://www.patreon.com/keefknight)

EURE: Well, thank you.

And I think that's gonna be the end, unless you have of one more thing you wanna say. You know you can say whatever you want to, Keith. Say go ahead.

KNIGHT: No, I mean, listen, I'm looking forward. I would love to be on again and talk a bit longer and just get into some of the stuff. Again, yesterday during the tech thing we talked about all this interesting stuff and this is the stuff that we should be recording and talking about.

But you know, let's do it again. Uh, and I appreciate you having me on.

EURE: Thank you.

And we'll see everybody in May and in June we'll celebrate [inaudible] as well.

Thank you everyone.

KNIGHT: Cheers.