

Michael Eure Show Transcript

Special Guest Clarence Williams

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EURE: 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 interesting topics. You can find us on the Eagle Stream YouTube Channel.

EURE: Thank you, and welcome again to our final episode of The Michael Eure Show for the spring semester. Great guest today, I'm so excited. Someone that is not just full of knowledge, but also wisdom. Mr. Clarence Williams, tell us a little bit about yourself, sir.

WILLIAMS: Well, I was born in Raleigh, raised in Gazelle Point in 1950. So I was raised in segregated Raleigh. I went to school here, graduated from Liggin High School, and went to St. Augustine's College.

EURE: All right, well, that is gonna be some more interesting things that we talk about. We got a lot to talk to you about though. Tell us how did you become, because you are an Emmy Award winning producer for WRAL. But how did you become interested in working with television? And how did you get the job at 15 years old?

WILLIAMS: I was in high school, and one of my counselors was Dr. Robert Bridges, who went on to become Superintendent. [CROSSTALK] Where he was in a program where he would try to finance the school jobs, and from school to career programs. And he asked me, he said, what do you wanna do? And I told him that I thought television was interesting. I was always fascinated by it and wanted to be involved. It wasn't in its infancy, because it was 1966 and I was in tenth grade. And he thought that I might be a good candidate. So he approached some people at the TV station. And they hired me.

EURE: Okay, well, we're gonna come back later and talk about some of the things you did there and how they built up. I'm gonna jump all the way over to your military, because you were in the military, and you took a special trip back to Vietnam.

WILLIAMS: I did.

EURE: You and Paul Pope and another gentleman.

WILLIAMS: Leonard Peoples.

EURE: Leonard Peoples, and I think David Crackery did a very big special. Tell us about that trip. What was it like?

WILLIAMS: It was, I guess it was surreal. Each of us had our individual reasons for going. And each of us, it impacted us individually and I assumed kind of differently, but collectively, the three of us sorta had the same feeling once we landed in Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City. Cuz I had never been to Saigon before. And I don't think either of them had also. Leonard Peoples, who, we all worked at the TV station together, Leonard started there prior to my working there. And we went to the same high school, Leonard was a few years older than I am. And he had already been involved in, I knew about him, but didn't know him well. But he did two tours as a marine in Vietnam, and Paul had done a tour in Vietnam, as did my dad. My dad was in Vietnam twice, did two tours.

EURE: That was a long war, wow.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was. My dad was in World War II, Korea, and two tours in Vietnam, decorated in each one, so it was kind of big shoes to fill.

EURE: All right.

WILLIAMS: But anyway, I thought about, he died in 1990, and I'd always wanted to go back. It was always a beautiful place. It was sort of war torn during the period that we were all there. But it was beautiful, the people were fascinating to me. And I always wanted to go back. I needed to go back just to sort of pray and celebrate the people I knew that we had lost. And I guess the word would be closure, I needed some closure.

EURE: Okay, and I knew you were involved with Mildred, Millie, VC? She was also a St. Augustine's graduate, right?

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

EURE: And she was, tell us what the organization.

WILLIAMS: She was in the Post 154 of the American Legion. And I got involved with that. Most of the members when I joined were World War II and Korean vets, most of them unfortunately passed on. Very few Vietnam era people or post Vietnam or even Gulf War people were involved in that post. And I thought it would be good for me to join and get involved. Wanting to help fellow veterans and to carry on the legacy of that post from Charles Norwood, who it was named after. He was the first black in World War I to die from Raleigh.

EURE: Okay, well, you have a lot of history, and we're gonna definitely connect you to our Veteran's Affairs area before you leave today. And make sure I walk you over there.

WILLIAMS: That's fine.

EURE: And you can come get with our students, and thank you for your service. In the community, I know we're jumping through, we got a lot of questions and you have so many good things to share with us. You're involved in a lot of service and community outreach efforts. Tell us about some of those.

WILLIAMS: One of my primary, in fact, I try to get out and do some work at least twice a week now, it's the Interfaith Food Show. This makes my 26th year of being involved. I've been everything from a truck driver to a board member. And it's something that I've believed in for years, whenever you visited. In the military, I was in South America and Haiti, I couldn't imagine. I hope to get back there sometime. Couldn't imagine what happened to Haiti after the earthquake. But Haiti was just dirt poor back in the 70s. It was horrible. And the people, and you saw people who literally didn't have enough to eat. And then you fast-forward to Vietnam, and seeing people, their kids in the countryside. Even though the country's lush and you can grow almost anything, there were people who were food deprived. And so I became interested in helping people.

EURE: Okay, and we have a question from the audience, I believe.

Q&A: Yeah, we wanna know about, you said you grew up in segregated Raleigh.

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q&A: Can you-

EURE: Talk about what it was like?

Q&A: None of us know anything about that. Can you tell us about that?

WILLIAMS: Well, it seems so real and it seems. All right, now, because my children would not even identify with that, of course they read in a history book. But I remember as a kid, going downtown shopping with my mother, and being the kind of kid I was and Our department store they had, it was called colored and white water fountains.

EURE: Wow.

WILLIAMS: And I would venture in and go drink from the white water fountain cuz I wanted to see if that water taste different.

EURE: Wow.

WILLIAMS: It didn't.

EURE: Okay.

WILLIAMS: The bathrooms were of course separate, and eating was separate. During that period it really didn't affect me because I lived in southeast Raleigh, everything that I needed was provided for me in southeast Raleigh. There people in my neighborhood that were, Trash collectors, all the way to college professors, PhDs that served St Augustine's in show. And Tuskegee Airmen, a whole cross-section of people economically it didn't factor in. So it was an interesting time that didn't affect me. Of course, we would see things on TV. My brother as a teenager, my older brother, I remember the impact it had on our family cuz he went downtown with other church members and picketed the Sir Walter Hotel and was arrested. And the turmoil that went on in my household because he was arrested, and I wanted to go down and protest, too, but I was too young.

EURE: Yeah, and we know our ligand has put out a lot of great people. You're one, Shon Saint Aunt very involved in the civil rights movement in Raleigh. But we're gonna come back, cuz you're involved in a whole lot of things, and we're gonna go to Dorothea Thicks. And they're gonna kind of update it as a destination park, and you're advocating for the African American Culture complex.

WILLIAMS: I am indeed. It, African American Culture Complex has been in existence for a number of years. It was primarily self-funded by Dr. Palmer and his wife, and he literally built it in his backyard. And it grew to being a destination place for a lot of people and kids coming to Raleigh to visit. It taught me a lot about history as an adult. I thought I sort of knew a lot about Raleigh and-

EURE: And the Amistad, I remember going to see that then.

WILLIAMS: Well, anyway, that property has been encroached on because of the value of the land. His long-range plan was to purchase the property adjacent to his house in Sunny Brook. And because of the wait in the complex, all the land prices shot up. And now, there are doctors and dentists' office on both sides of his property. And the construction of that road, he told me when he first moved there, that road, Saint Brook, didn't exist.

EURE: Wow.

WILLIAMS: And so with the erosion from the construction and the encroachment of this land, so he's landlocked, we thought that it would be good to move that facility to a permanent place. And of course, Dr. Palmer and his wife were advancing in age. So for their legacy and for the education and history of the people in this area and the region, I thought we should move it to-

EURE: I agree.

WILLIAMS: Thicks' apartment.

EURE: Dr. Palmer is an awesome fellow cuz he was the first executive director of the integrated state teachers organization.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

EURE: So that's a big deal.

WILLIAMS: He's a very fascinating man.

EURE: And I'm glad to know that you're doing that. And how could the audience, if they're interested in kinda helping with being involved, is there a way for them to do that?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, they need to express to the city of Raleigh that their desire to. The park is gonna be fascinating in so many aspects, but they need to express to the city of Raleigh their desire to have that located on that property. There are a lot of buildings there, some of which will be demolished, some of which we could retrofit and move the museum into them. Walking around the campus of Thicks', I could probably identify some buildings for him.

EURE: And when you talked about the current location of the complex, which is really very close to Waite Tech's Perry Health Science campus-

WILLIAMS: It is indeed, right down the street.

EURE: So let me ask you. Because I know you're connected to Wake Tech, and you've been involved in a number of ways. Can you tell us some of the people you know or some of the things you've done here with the school?

WILLIAMS: Well, I'm on this beautiful campus, which is fascinating. You toured me about a year or so ago on this campus. I'm fascinated by the growth of this particular campus, the original campus out on 401, and the other campuses. I remember meeting Dr. Scott, I worked on the advisory board for Waite Tech for a period. And I remember meeting Dr. Scott and his vision for this campus.

EURE: Right, before it was even here.

WILLIAMS: Before it was even here.

EURE: This is the Northern Waite campus, for you who don't know.

WILLIAMS: He was a fascinating man then and now, and to see how he's shepherd the growth of this campus is just nothing short of a miracle. Plus I think, I'm a big believer in the programs here because particularly now when you see the people in traditional schools and just leave school with such massive debts. That's so unfortunate. I believe if you could come through some of the programs here at Wake

Tech, you could alleviate some of that mountain of debt you're gonna be faced with after all.

EURE: I agree, and it's a good seamless transfer to a four-year school if you want that. And the skilled trades, applied engineering, wonderful careers in those.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

EURE: And you could make the same amount of money as some people with masters and doctorates, so that's really something to pay attention to.

WILLIAMS: Indeed.

Q&A: We have another question.

EURE: We have another question from the audience, go ahead.

Q&A: Yeah, going back to, you were talking about growing up in the southeast, Raleigh, and the community had everything you needed. And people from doctors and lawyers all the way down to the bricklayer lived in that community. And the student wants to know, when desegregation sort of became the norm, did that change the flavor of the southeast community? Did people use that as an excuse to go other places? Has that changed?

WILLIAMS: It did indeed. Now I went because I did some post work in other schools, but I went to St. Augustine, Shaw University, Fayetteville State, the traditional black schools. And that changed, because when the other schools became open to accepting students from all races, then that afforded an opportunity to go to other places. So that changed the community in a sense where everybody kind of stayed. At home being home in a family of black schools. We broaden everything, which was good. We were paying the taxes for it anyway. So we might as well take advantage of that.

EURE: And unfortunately, separate is never equal, good ahead.

WILLIAMS: Separate is absolutely not equal. The neighborhoods themselves were where you can see the long-term effect of gentrification now. That is good and bad so. And job opportunities were broadened when the neighborhood is changing and more civil rights who were afforded us.

EURE: Okay, well, and I think that we are moving in a great direction. And I like the idea of going back to the historical pieces, but also moving forward.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

EURE: So I'm gonna go to-

Q&A: One question, Takiri Wade wanted to know Holden College, was that named after the Holden family?

WILLIAMS: I think it was, I don't know the history of it. My father, at the conclusion of his military career, I guess, he was a lifelong learner, went to what would have been called Holden Tech.

EURE: Yeah, WW Holden Institute. I remember that.

WILLIAMS: And it evolved into Wake Tech.

EURE: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And what a great evolution it's become too. This is a great educational facility now.

EURE: Okay, yes, that was a good question. Several years ago during an interview at WRAL, I had the chance to meet you. I was with Emily Grant and we're talking about the statewide kickoff to Black History Month. Afterwards, you became involved with us and involved with the committees. What were some of your favorite shows to produce at the station? And do you find yourself connecting after certain shows or were you just very fortunate?

WILLIAMS: Well, I always had a keen interest in history. My degree, by the way, is in accounting.

EURE: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Never did a day of accounting in my life, and wouldn't. You don't want me to do your taxes. And of course, television was always in my blood. And so I had an opportunity to work from everything from running camera on Monday Night Football. This is gonna take me how a co-sale was there-

EURE: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: I work for ABC as an independent cameraman did my favorite shows. I did a lot of sports, I starting off working on camera and then direct in TV and directing. The state coaches shows used to be my purview. So football and basketball.

EURE: You made NC State?

WILLIAMS: NC State, that was my assignment. And we did Sunday coaches shows. And in fact, we changed the way you did coaches shows when you would go. As the equipment evolved, we did a lot of on-location shoots. Probably my favorite time

was producing and directing the Jim Brown show. And just working with him, I think about him often, how much fun that was. That was one of the shows. And of course, doing news is always been fun. But my greatest joy was doing sports shows and public affairs shows, such as the one that Emily would frequent. And that was the beginning of my involvement with the known economies in the history.

EURE: Okay, all right now, most television and radio stations have incorporated social media into their mix these days. What are some of your observations of this new phenomenon?

WILLIAMS: I guess, I say good and bad, because there's so many other outlets for people to gather information. I think Capitol Broadcasting is in the forefront of that. We have probably one of the most successful online presence-

EURE: Of the whole-

WILLIAMS: Absolutely, and probably in the country, I would say. And so we got in it early, perfected it, brought in some good technical people, moved it ahead of almost anyone in our industry and-

EURE: Did we have another question?

Q&A: We have several questions.

EURE: Several questions, we'll be quiet, just yell out the questions. Go ahead.

Q&A: Okay, I'm gonna ask you the easier one first. And then the harder one, I'm not sure. Actually, well, I'm gonna start with Mohammed's. Mohammed Ibrahim wants to know. I'm not sure if this was discussed earlier, you actually didn't. But in what ways do you think that the history of African Americans will be preserved in downtown Raleigh with how downtown seems to be changing? So are you afraid that anything's gonna be wiped away?

WILLIAMS: I hope not, I'm very optimistic. That is why I'm involved with the African American Culture Center, relocating it to Dorothy Dicks Park. Downtown presently is the pope house which is on-

EURE: Is it black?

WILLIAMS: Wilmington.

EURE: Wilmington, okay.

WILLIAMS: And it was the home of Dr. Monashis Pope. And the history now just to be able, a few years ago, to walk in that house. And walk around his office, his

medical office was there. And he was involved I think a kind of medical director and a Spanish American.

EURE: Wow.

WILLIAMS: So there is a lot of history. He was the first black to run from Mayor of Raleigh. Those kinda historical delegates will need to be preserved.

EURE: And this is way before the civil rights movement-

WILLIAMS: Way, way back.

EURE: In the 1800s, yes.

Q&A: Wow.

WILLIAMS: I would love to see other aspects of Raleigh, and the history of Raleigh, which I'm familiar with it, but a lot of the kids and younger people aren't. But for me, it was way back being raised where the tradition was storytelling. I had people, and I had named two people within two houses of my neighborhood who lived to be over 105 years old. And they would tell me history. I met one lady that lived on Hargett Street in Downtown Raleigh, when my grandmother would take me to visit her, who reportedly was 118. And her parents were slaves. So just how they kinda history passed on to you.

EURE: And Anna J Cooper who is a graduate from Saint Aug too. And she was first African-American woman to study at Savant in France. So a lot are up from South.

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

EURE: But now give us some more questions, cuz I know we're getting excited, go ahead.

Q&A: Yeah, we're running out of time. Okay, this is a more student-centered question. Takiri Wade wants to know. She laughed when you said you started out as an accountant, cuz you were not an accountant now And clearly didn't do it. She wanted to know, after getting your degree, what made you change gears?

WILLIAMS: Well, I always worked in television and And once you get television in your blood and the way it evolved from set cameras to size of, a Volkswagen to a lipstick camera, for example. With this, I had an application when I was working in TV. I could literally go on the air live. I could call in the television station, tell them I was at the scene of a story and go on the air live with just this camera.

EURE: And we're gonna get you involved with Eagle Stream and the Michael Eure Show, so we can get our students and myself trained.

Q&A: Speaking about the media and its role in the community environment.

EURE: Yes.

Q&A: Richard Sellens is on here today.

EURE: All right!

Q&A: One of our-

EURE: One of our big people that connects!

Q&A: And he wants to know, number one, when's he gonna be on this show?! And number two, he said could you please talk about the role of the media in community development, particularly in a region like Wake County that's growing so rapidly.

WILLIAMS: Well I can only talk about it from my perspective. I was very fortunate to work with Capitol Broadcasting Company and the leader, Jim Goodman. Now his son is there, he's gonna do a great job also. But he always stressed community involvement and he put, he made out time available for the employees to get involved with the community, and encouraged it. My involvement with the Interfaith Food Shuttle was born out of that.

EURE: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Where one, I was recruited to go work on that and just fell in love with it. So, if you look at employees of Capitol, and even to this day, you will see them involved in the community. That was the forefront of our existence, to be involved with the community, not just in this region, well, primarily in this region, but we've spread our tentacles. And I say we. It's like I still work there.

EURE: Yes, you do.

WILLIAMS: Nationally because-

EURE: You're an alumnus, go ahead.

WILLIAMS: We have to this day the oldest scouting program in the country, the longest running scouting program. And those kids who study Television, they have curriculums in school and now here at Waite tech. But back when we started, they didn't have a way to introduce themselves to broadcasting field. So the media were as is we put it, is, totally involved in the community.

EURE: We have any more questions? Okay, so I have really

Q&A: Take a step back.

EURE: One more? It popped up.

Q&A: ARE there audio or video recordings of some of these historical stories that are not being written? Particular people in their 90s and above that still remember the past history. Do we have any oral or are we recording these oral histories?

WILLIAMS: I've always encouraged people in their own families, there are plenty of repositories of oral history nationally. Of course they go around and do recordings. So I just read a book on the slave narratives where people who were slaves, were interviewed. So there, absolutely. At Capitol Broadcasting Company, you can go to their archive site and see a lot of the old shows, newscasts. So yeah, there are methods of exploring past history. Yes.

EURE: And if you have any young people that you're working with, this is a good project for them to go in the community and interview, and become part of Eagle String for example. And learn how to use these phones, these smart phones. This is a great project. And Wake Technical community college is a community college.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

EURE: We do a lot in the community.

WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

EURE: And we wanna do more with you. And we're going to do what we do, just because I know you, okay

WILLIAMS: That's great.

EURE: And I thank you so much and I thank for producing this show and allowing us to collaborate through student services and academics side and through the first in the world. And so thank you so very much and we're going to wind up I think because we ran out of time we enjoyed you, If you have any additional question feel free to call or email on 919-532-5917 or meure@waketech.edu. Once again, thank you for joining us today.

WILLIAMS: And thank you, Michael.

EURE: All right.