

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host Allison Tyra and today I'm joined by Dr. Courtney Jarrett who, like many of my guests, has written a book about women's history. But unlike most of the authors I talk to, hers is a children's book. So first, would you like to tell us about *Muncie Women A to Z*?

CJ: I got the idea actually several years ago. I was working with one of my colleagues Rachel in Women and Gender Studies on my campus and one of my friends, Melissa Gentry, who works at our library on campus, doing some women's history research and talking about some of the women that we were talking about at that point. We were actually getting ready to celebrate the suffrage centennial here in the U.S. So Rachel and I were going to teach a class about that and we're talking about all these cool women that were related to suffrage. And just from the stories that we were looking at and learning about, I was like, "this would be so cool if we talked about it from a children's perspective and got students that are elementary school age to learn about really cool women in the local Muncie community and Indiana as a state." All of the fun work and interesting things that they did historically with suffrage and beyond throughout history that we never would talk about anywhere else. Every time a name came up I was like, "I have taken so many history classes. I have a history degree. Why didn't I learn about these women?" I thought from a children's book perspective, I had never written one before but I have children. And so I've read many, many, many children's books. I also have nieces and nephews that I've read with and to. And so I thought it would be fun to do an alphabetical book. And so the book is called *Muncie Women A to Z* and I have a woman for each of the letters of the alphabet. It matches their last name. And so what I did is I looked at some of the historical things to see which women, the stories might be interesting to me, interesting to kids, just an important part of our local history. And then I put the list together. There are also current women that are still living doing amazing things which will be history because we're creating history every day. And so for those folks that are still here, I was able to sit down and talk with them about their experiences and get a feel for what they are passionate about and not just work but life things as well. And so it was a really fun project to put together and it was also, as I think with writing any book, a lot longer than I thought it would be, both the book and the time it took to write everything. And yeah it was a blast. I had to trim some of them down. I was like, okay if third and fourth graders are going to read this they're not going to want to read 10 pages about each woman even though that's what I want to write. So it was a project but it was so so so fun and so out of the norm for my everyday life. So very enjoyable.

AT: So when does the adult version with 10 pages on each woman come out?

CJ: I don't know. In fact if my husband were here or my boss, they would both be like, "you're wearing too many hats right now. But this is one of those things that I would do for fun, like when I am sitting at a soccer match that my kid's playing in or at track practice or something. That's what I did for this book is I found little moments to take a break and do something fun. So that would be amazing. I don't know if I'm ever going to pull that off though but we'll see. Never say never, I suppose.

AT: So obviously there's a lot of older folks who could also use this knowledge and were not taught it but why did you want to focus on a younger audience specifically? Especially since you're someone who works at a university.

CJ: Yeah that's a super fair point because yes, people of all ages and generations should be learning about amazing humans whatever their gender, sexual, racial, ethnic identities are, that are doing work in the community that are not just presidents or generals in wars or celebrity status folks. Because yeah we could sit and argue about how important that work is for different things but sometimes it's literally just the day-to-day folks who are making sure that the trash gets picked up on a regular schedule in our community or running a women's shelter because we currently have a housing insecure population that is rising that no one really

wants to do anything about and so the people that are running our shelters are like, "we'll just do it. We're going to step in and do it." And it's folks that care about the environment and care about our youth and those things. They're just going about doing their every day but it's making a huge impact. And they may not want to be recognized for that. It's like I said when I started the project and I was interviewing some of the women, they would be like "why me? Why did you choose me?" And I'm like "because what you're doing makes a difference. You may not think that or you may not think that it's something monumental but it is."

And so I had already written a textbook for women and gender studies for the age group that is higher ed and there are lots of really amazing badass feminists in that book because it's called *Not Your Mama's Feminism*. But I thought, "let's get them early." Equality starts from day one, even before that when they're in the womb. My dudes are both male identifying and were going to Feminist for Action student group meetings when I was pregnant with both of them. I think talking about equity and having them think that they should make the world a better place even if it's something small, is really really important. And so I thought that if I could write about these amazing women that some of them are maybe just doing small things, that that's important as well and kids will see that. They'll get it that anything that you do can have an impact, whether it's small or or large. And so do I want adults also to know those things and probably have more adults read the book than kids? Maybe, I'm not out there polling everybody and I do know that some of my friends that have classrooms have bought the book and have utilized it but I also think that my family has bought a great number of them and they are all adult age. So really it is for everybody but I did write it at a fourth grade reading level.

AT: Now you hinted at this earlier but my understanding is that this book was influenced by the larger group of Muncie Notable Women, which people can find on Instagram under the handle @theMuncieNotables. So can you tell us about that larger project

CJ: Yes, would love to, because it was really the starting point for this project, at least the idea. Notable Muncie Women is a group that was actually started by my friends here at Ball State in Bracken Library in the archives and in our map collection area and then the Delaware County Historical Society here in town. And then we also have this really cool place called Minnetrista, which is a cultural center here in Muncie. And there are really great local archives at Minnetrista because it used to be owned by the Ball family of which Ball State is named for. So everything's connected. There's a group of folks that are connected with those organizations that early on got together and again, like with the premise of my book realized that there are lots of really amazing women both in history and today that have done great work that have just not been talked about. So originally they thought "let's make a list." And so it's a Google Doc, there's now like 700 names on it. But so they would get together originally when they were building the list and take turns. And so at one meeting one person would share their research about this really cool human doing cool things and then the next time my friend Melissa Gentry from the library would share something really great. And so they would compile that way and that's how my friend Rachel and I got involved. They were like, "hey you guys are cool women, you know other cool women, let's get connected and talk about these things." And that's when we were like, "yo we got to look at this suffrage stuff." And we proposed that class and we were able to teach it in fall of 2020 to celebrate the suffrage centennial and a lot of what we pulled were folks from that list but we were also able to use it when our students were completing projects for that class and honestly beyond. It's still something that can be utilized regularly. But our students were able to look at it and pick out women to do research about that had been influential. There's a really great book that talks about suffrage in Indiana and Rachel and I were fortunate enough to hear the author speak right before the pandemic started. And she talked about how a lot of the archives in Indiana relative to that time period, the start of the suffrage movement, have been damaged. And so tracking some of those things down and tracking down newspaper archives and things to put the pieces together has been really challenging. So all the more reason to have something like a Google Doc that has links and and resources and sometimes even images. Melissa is fabulous at going to newspapers.com

and digging out old pictures of people. Sometimes it's their obituaries which is a little sad but sometimes it's really cool photos of them in action and that ties back to my book. When I was creating the images for the book, I was able to use some of the pictures that were connected and others that I was doing some research. And then I would put them together like little children's images. So I used a website and I would use the original photo and then I would put in a description to say, "make this cartoonish," because I am not an artist by any means. And so I was able to use that and Adobe Photoshop to tinker with them a little bit. But it was super fun to look at the old pictures. Not every woman that's on the Muncie notable list has a photo but many of them do and then the other ones like I said that are in my book that are still living, I asked them for photos of themselves and so that was really cute too. They picked ones that they really enjoyed.

AT: Now I want to come back to something that you were saying earlier about women saying "oh! Why me?" And I do find that I think this is more gendered there are certainly men and other folks who may identify outside the binary, there are plenty of people in general who are just focused on doing the work and they're not in it for the attention and I do think that's gendered. (CJ: Yeah.) I do think a lot of activist movements, you see the more marginalized people doing the invisible work behind the scenes and they're not the ones making speeches or...

CJ: At the forefront. Yeah, I agree with you, I think it's gendered. To be fair though, I think for other folks, I immediately thought of a couple male-identifying friends that would have said the same thing, But I also think it goes back to that idea, which there is research out there about of, "oh well I don't meet the job requirements so I'm not going to apply for this job." And then someone who's maybe male identifying would be like, "well it doesn't matter because I know that I can do the job. So I'm going to go ahead and apply and then I'll just wow them in the interview or they'll look at my resume and be like, 'okay well that makes all good sense.'" That's more of a patriarchal society thing where we're just conditioned to believe that we're supposed to fit into this box and if we stray outside the box regardless of what it is, whether it's a job or an identity or whatever, then we're no longer fitting and acclimating to the society that we live and exist in. Where really what should happen is, "oh, that job sounds great. I want to do that. I'm going to put my name in the hat." Or, "yeah, hell yeah, I'm out in the community doing great things. Thank you for noticing." And it doesn't mean you have to be at the forefront or the person that's speaking all the time. But it does mean that you don't also have to be humble. There's time for that. Kendrick Lamar taught us that. "Be humble, sit down." He was talking to middle class white dudes I think. But there's the opposite time where it's like, "oh this is a person that maybe is humble all the time." At one point you can stand up and be like, "yeah I did that and that's great." And so that's one of the nice things I think about this book is that some of the women that are living have bought 12 copies to give out because they're like, "hell yeah, I did that. Courtney saw worth." And I'm like, well you don't need me for that. You can see worth because what you're doing is amazing you're a badass and everybody should know about it

AT: There was that moment during the 2024 US elections where Sarah Huckabee Sanders, because so many women do this to other women, but she made a comment basically implying that because Kamala Harris didn't have biological children, she wasn't a real mom. And the way she framed it was that she had her kids to keep her humble and Harris didn't have anyone keeping her humble. And I love Harris's husband because he came out and basically said, women don't need to be kept humble. (CJ: No.) Shout out to Doug Emhoff, love him.

CJ: Yeah and she has a mom nickname, she's Momala, (AT: So cute!) Yeah she's parenting. My kids do not keep me humble, they barely keep me sane. I don't think that's a lived experience for everyone.

AT: I think they may be counterproductive on the keeping you sane front.

CJ: Yes 100 %. Not every day, but whoo, there are some doozies. Yeah I don't love that. There's a time to be humble, I don't love recognition all the time either. But there are also some days where I'm like, "damn it, I did that and I'm really proud of it and so hell yeah I'm going to talk about it."

AT: I think there's things that we don't feel are worth recognition. Most people I know would cringe if people started singing happy birthday to them in a restaurant (CJ: Oh sure.) because that's not an accomplishment. If anything you should be singing and giving cake to my mother. She did all the work on that front.

CJ: Yeah everybody grows old or has these birthdays whether we celebrate them or not so that doesn't necessarily have to be a feat, I suppose.

AT: But when it is something that you have put a lot of work into, I think it's perfectly fair to be proud of it and as women we're taught that our pride makes us unlikeable and we're penalized for it. (CJ: Yeah, not a fan of that but here we are.) When we first started talking you said, "you may have to interrupt me because I'm going to talk so much about this." This is something that I've noticed with a lot of my guests, who so far are all female identifying or non-binary. I have invited cis dudes, just to be clear. I have invited some of them. (CJ: To each their own.) But something that I do hear fairly often is, "if I'm going on too much, if I'm rambling, feel free to interrupt me." And I do think it's very much that mindset that we are indoctrinated with, that we're not supposed to take up space even when quite literally the whole point of this conversation, the whole reason we are here today is for you to talk about this work. But even in that context, you felt compelled to say, and this is not a critique of you (CJ: No.) but it is that commentary, it's reflective of this idea that we're not supposed to express this pride in our work even when other people are saying it's awesome.

CJ: Yeah and also the reason that I say that sort of thing, you're exactly right but I do it for another reason that is very gendered, which is I want the other people in the space with me to be comfortable. And if there's someone talking all the time for a long extended period of time then that may mean that the person or group of people that I'm talking to is not comfortable or they're not contributing, not that it has to be an equal amount, but caring about how the other people experience whatever's going on. That is definitely one of my traits and and I would argue that there are many many other folks, not just male identifying, but many, many other folks that don't care about that. But I do.

AT: As the other person in this conversation, talk as much as you want, please!

CJ: Sure, and I probably would have done that anyway but I was also like, "girl it's your podcast, so lead the way. I'll keep talking and talk and talk and talk some more and that's all right."

AT: You will respect my authority in this hierarchy (laughter) which is funny because I am literally not the authority in any of these conversations. The whole point is that I'm having someone on to talk about a topic that I know sometimes very little about (CJ: Yeah, yeah.) and that they are quite literally an expert in. Now I am aware that this may be like asking you to choose between your children but are there any women in particular that you'd like to tell us about?

CJ: So many. We don't have time for all 26, but I'm going to tell you about three of them. So first of all I included a drag queen in my book and so her name is Glinda B. Fierce. And so it was great when I got the photo of her to put together and the fun thing that I did for each of them is I incorporated the tiles that I have on the front, I include that with each woman as I write about them in the book and I also give them a tagline and so Glinda's tagline is "Glinda B. Fierce who brings the glamor and love to the local community." And so for

Glinda I really talk about the work that that she has done in our community with organizing our Pride event that happens in Muncie every year on Labor Day weekend and outside of all of the really cool events that go on through that whole weekend there is always a drag show. It is always outdoors, it is always open to the entire public. There's lots of things that are amazing about that, but what is amazing to me about that is that the community really embraces the show. It's where we host a lot of different outdoor events in Muncie and so there are families there, there are couples there, there are just people who rode up on their bikes that are participating and Glinda and the other performers are interacting with every single person. So it's not the people that are just there celebrating Pride, it's the the folks that are there just to check out and see what's going on, or who have just been like, "oh I didn't even know there was a drag show today, let's go and celebrate and do cool things." And so Glinda is really about inclusion for everybody, every gender identity, every sexual identity, every body type, every everything. And so I joke with them that they've never met a stranger ever. Even if they don't know them yet, it just means that they don't know them yet. So I really really appreciate that. I we looked up the word "inclusion" in the dictionary, if it were Muncie-based, Glinda's picture would be there and so I absolutely love that about Glinda and all of their amazing work.

The next person that I'm going to share with you is a fabulous human whose name is Morgan Roddy and Morgan's picture is great because she is standing in front of what looks like maybe chocolate pudding but she has a rainbow colored apron on and I chose that very specifically. Morgan's subtitle for my book is "Morgan Roddy, who puts their chocolate making skills to good work in Muncie and beyond." So Morgan is most well known in our community for running a company that's called Queer Chocolatier and Queer Chocolatier used to have a physical space in our village right next to our college campus here at Ball State and so it was amazing for folks again of any different identity to come in and eat chocolate that Morgan has made with her bare hands and also the most amazing baked goods I have ever tasted in my entire life, these little cinnamon bun things I would order from her during the pandemic and she would just drop off on my front porch and I'm like, "I love you so much, you are the best." But it's not just about the goods, it's about the environment and the way that she makes people feel, which is supported regardless of what's going on with them. So while the physical space does not exist any longer because pandemics and rent and expensive things, Morgan has really not given up on the idea of making chocolate that is inclusive and brings people together and starts conversations. So you will find her most frequently on the weekends at our farmers markets, both the indoor one in the winter and the outdoor one at Minnetrista, our cultural center. So yes just a fabulous human making delicious things and really supporting all kinds of marginalized identities in our community but also really supporting everyone and so I'm just always amazed by the work that she's doing, literally just existing.

And so then the final one that I'm going to talk about is what I did for the letter x because you may imagine that it's challenging to find someone who has a last name that starts with x and it is. So what I did is, I have a little graphic here that's just a girl with some sparkly things around her and so the tagline that I have for that I have "Jane X, who are the women we don't know or we have yet to know." and so what I talk about here is that there are amazing women in our community whose stories weren't always told in our history books or in the newspaper or in the archives that we can look at. So they're just people who have done cool things behind the scenes and so we may not get to know them but also, think of all the amazing people, the kids that are reading these books that are growing up that will then be the next iteration of amazing notable Muncie women. And so I wanted to include that as a placeholder of, there are so many different folks they may not have an x last name but they're still doing the good the good things in our community and beyond and so they deserve celebration even if if we don't have a name for them.

AT: So I've talked with different guests before about the importance of local history and from my perspective I would say that the biggest one is that it is much more likely to recognize people who made a difference in their community on their local level but they didn't rise to national prominence and I think that is really important because this idea that if you're not making speeches on the National Mall, then your story isn't worth telling,

that's just not a fair reflection of history and a lot of times it is, I'm gonna say it again, I feel like that's gendered.

CJ: Sure, there are just as many folks with other identities though that we just don't talk about because again we're conditioned to, when we think of history as a subject or a class that we took in high school, we have to talk about presidents, We have to talk about wars. We have to talk about really monumental events. And so I guess someone named Betsy Ross making the flag is a monumental event. If you're lucky you might get an iron-jawed angels, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B Anthony, Alice Paul kind of thing. Disability wise, you might get a Helen Keller maybe but you feel real bad for her and so that's not really a message that we want to send out when we're talking about folks with disabilities doing great things.

AT: Also Helen Keller publicly advocated for the euthanization of disabled infants. (CJ: Yeah.) So there's a reason that people tell the child version, because as an adult she was a firebrand socialist. Also she wrote her memoir when she was like 20 which is always iffy, I would say. (CJ: Yeah, lived a whole lot of life after that.) The way we tell her story is very specifically framed, shall we say.

CJ: Yeah, that's a great way to put it. But from a disability perspective particularly with folks with apparent disabilities, it's just not talked about. We might talk about it with Franklin Delano Roosevelt but again we can talk about how he didn't want to be identified as a person with a disability and actively tried to hide it.

AT: Also Woodrow Wilson had a stroke in office and so for I believe more than a year his wife was essentially running the country and I would say we can agree that's a disability that the president was hiding. JFK had chronic illness and back issues and in fact there's a theory that if he hadn't been wearing his back brace when he was shot, because the back brace kept him upright and there's a good chance that he would not have been shot the second time if it wasn't for the back brace but we never talk about that. We don't talk about Harriet Tubman, I believe the theory is that she had epilepsy. Sojourner Truth had a disability in one of her hands. The woman who founded the Girl Scouts was deaf. We just don't talk about these aspects of them.

CJ: No and a part of that is, we're covering so much ground in a history class or even a book right, you're really just hitting these highlighted things. But it's whoever is writing the thing or wherever they got their research from that that's how that viewpoint is created. And so yeah it is really hard I think from a local standpoint to really be like, "hey this history is important" because it's like, "oh well you also need to learn these 20,000 other things that are also deemed important." But it also makes me think of the idea that, and I talk with with my students about this all the time, from a political aspect the local politics are almost more important than the state politics or the federal. They're all important, especially right now, but you can actively see the difference that your city council person is doing to get the street paved in your neighborhood or to get a sidewalk built or curb cuts or things like that. And you can easily contact those folks or my sister who sits on the school board in her hometown, her email is public. People will say, "hey I've got this issue, can you help me with it?" And the action may not be immediate but when people are doing their jobs in that regard, you're gonna get a response and you're gonna hear, "this is what we can do for you." And I greatly, greatly appreciate that whereas in some other instances, if you contact a state legislator or a governor, you're probably not going to get a response. Or if you do it's not going to be from them, it's going to be from somebody else that works for them, and so then you're hearing their perspective from that lens. So yeah it's important to talk about for sure, especially because I think the work that is happening locally to where you are has a huge impact on your life whether you know it or not. So I will always be a big proponent of talking about the local things that that are going on, big or small.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember well-behaved women rarely make history.