

Notes from the Underground

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THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND

Notes from a Sabbatical: A Peak Behind the Curtain

By: Gregory Kosc, faculty

When I tell most folks that I have the year off from teaching because I am on sabbatical, they tend to roll their eyes a bit while shooting at me an unmistakable “you’ve got a cushy job” look. No doubt, I am incredibly fortunate, and I completely understand such an initial reaction. That said, I do not see sabbatical as some sort of vacation.

From an intellectual perspective, colleges and universities could not exist without sabbatical programs because they are what give us the time necessary to produce new knowledge, which must be written up, peer-reviewed, and published. In the case of history, these layers of knowledge then pile up and allow us to understand our past more clearly and in finer detail. By conveying a more accurate recounting of the past, students gain more clarity about where we come from, who we are, and, consequently, what good or ill we have done.

You might be wondering, if we have thousands of academics piling up the number of peer-reviewed articles and monographs (books), then, isn’t there a limit to the knowledge we need to pile up? The answer is no, and perhaps the most important reason for that revolves around two things that happen as we continue on in time. The first is that, as societies evolve, they begin to ask different questions about the past in order to understand their present difficulties/situations. Sometimes,

those difficulties involve enduring questions, and others might be questions that only pique up at certain times. Regardless, historians must be ready to serve the public and policy-makers regarding our society’s past encounters with a variety of different issues. The second thing is that, as we move on in time, more history takes place or develops, so it is important to begin writing and incorporating the very recent past into the historical narrative. It helps us make sense of things more clearly. Unfortunately, most U.S. history survey classes end somewhere around the Vietnam War or with Watergate, but a heck of a lot has happened since then, which leaves tremendous room for a mountain of research that is just waiting to be developed.

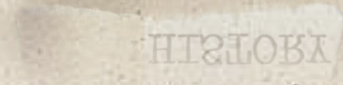
I too am trying to do my part to help build knowledge. In the first part of the academic year, I worked on completing a long-term research project based on a prominent British female big-game hunter, Agnes Herbert, who wrote in the early twentieth century. This research was an extension of my research interests in hunting and gender, which I have been researching for about 15 years now. Through that project, I was able to uncover quite a bit about Herbert’s personal life, public persona, and gender performance, as well as her career and relationship with her publisher in the male-dominated genre of hunting. Crucial letters between Herbert and her publisher demonstrate that hunting accounts were, to use Herbert’s verbiage, “embellished.” In fact, entire sections of her accounts appear to be completely made up, and what’s more is that she was extremely plugged into the hunter-writer community and from her letters it seems other hunter-writers were engaged in the same schemes. Most analyses of hunting literature hint that such activities may have taken place, but now we have some definitive proof. While this is a modest contribution to our body of knowledge, it represents a step forward. Now, we can begin to ask even more questions about the editing process that non-fiction adventure/travel writers were put through in their efforts to publish their accounts.

The second part of my sabbatical is going to be spent developing a couple of projects related to Tarrant County’s history. Developing more literature on the African American experience in our area is crucial. Up to this point, only one academic press book on African American history in Fort Worth has been published, which means that for Arlington there is absolutely nothing. Since the book on Fort Worth relied so heavily on accounts from white-owned and -edited newspapers during the era of Jim Crow, it is necessarily incomplete as

certain news stories were completely ignored by whites unless they cast African Americans in a particular light. To remedy the situation I am reading the 3,000+ articles that mention Fort Worth in the famous black newspaper *The Chicago Defender*. From there, I will be reading the *Dallas Express*, the most important black newspaper in North Texas, to try to piece a little bit more of the story together. At the moment, I am in the very beginning stages of this, but there are already a few figures who seem to merit greater local public recognition and research. One that stands out is Hattie M. Crooms, who was an evangelist preacher in the early twentieth century that challenged other black religious figures and the white establishment regarding the abuse of black women. Another is Fort Worth’s Oze “Ozzie” Simmons, who was a star football player at Iowa University. He is still regarded in popular lore as a player who was hesitant to engage with the press, but that’s because no one ever bothered to consult black newspapers. Simmons was interviewed multiple times by the *Defender*. He was a proud Texan as well as an outspoken critic of the “racket” of college football and of European imperialism in Africa. Another interesting story that I just unearthed pointed out that of every southern city, Fort Worth had the best public health outcomes for the African American community in the 1920s. Clearly, Fort Worth’s black medical establishment was doing something right. For too long these stories and people have been segregated and erased from Fort Worth’s popular memory. It is time for us to unearth the complete story of Fort Worth’s history and integrate it into the larger narratives. I aim to bring these stories (and others) to light. As a community we deserve a full accounting of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

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Historical Book Review: Stamped from the Beginning

By: Despina, Student

Ibram K. Kendi's book, *Stamped from the Beginning*, is a powerful historical account of what it is like to be black in regions across the globe that are connected to the Atlantic world. The title alone sends an impactful message about how black people have been branded as less than human by the colonial powers of Western Europe, the creators of the United States, and Muslim Arabs throughout the Middle East.

Part One, titled "Cotton Mather," is where Kendi gets into the origin of racist thought, which he argues dates back to ancient Greece through thinkers like Aristotle who referred to people of African descent as those with 'burnt' faces. To justify Greek superiority, Aristotle stated that people who live in extremely hot and cold climates were ugly and incapable of freedom; in fact, the term 'Ethiopian' comes from the Greek prefix "aitho," which means "I burn," and the suffix "ops," which means face. By the time of the Middle Ages in Europe, pseudo-scientific and religious ideas such as polygenesis were well established, which is the belief that human beings came from different predecessors to explain racial inequalities. For example, Kendi discusses a religious family called the Mathers, who during the colonial period of English North America believed that African slavery was natural and normal and holy. Cotton Mather, in particular, was a key figure in the normalization of slavery by spreading the message that the institution was only beneficial to black people. Religious justification was often used to dehumanize enslaved Africans living in the Western Hemisphere, and religious practitioners infused a sense of self-hatred into the minds of many black people through Christianity. In other words, Kendi argues that the United States is a country built on anti-blackness, and the founding fathers of this country – such as Thomas Jefferson – reinforced this dehumanization by raping young black woman like Sally Hemings, who bore several children from her interactions with him.

Speaking of Thomas Jefferson, he and his life are the primary focus of Part Two. As a founding father of the United States who was born during the Enlightenment era, he like many European thinkers believed they were bringing knowledge and light to a dark world; hence, the word "light" in Enlightenment. Intellectuals such as Benjamin Franklin became used to correlating whiteness with light and rationale, whereas black, dark, and incomprehension were often grouped into one category. This notion became eternally engraved in the minds of white people. Kendi does a fine job articulating the concept of assimilationist ideas, which revolves around the notion that adapting into white culture will "improve" black people. This is also called uplift suasion, which Kendi describes as the racism of good intentions because it

revolves around the belief that black people can persuade white people against certain aspects of their racism through hard work. Coupled with the fact that the sciences and religions have racist notions embedded within them as well, and one begins to see how normalized these distinctions became in the Atlantic world. This book also explains the nature of this racism even further by detailing the historical dehumanization of black bodies. One case in particular revolves around Sarah Baartman, a woman of the South African Khoikhoi tribe. The Khoikhoi were deemed the most animal like of Africans by colonial powers, who displayed their body parts in "civilized" cities like Paris for centuries before they eventually returning the remains of these people to her native homeland.

Part Three: William Lloyd Garrison, revolves around an American assimilationist who believed that anti-blackness could be eradicated through freedom and education. Garrison created a publication called "The Liberator", which gave freed blacks the encouragement to stand up and oppose laws that went against their unalienable rights. Despite his good intentions, though, the entire concept of assimilationism was racist in nature because it placed Africans in an inferior position. One notion in particular of black families being mentally dysfunctional and deeming black men as incompetent and black women as overly sexual people, stemmed from the assimilationists' way of thinking. In other words, even abolitionists like Garrison harbored racist perceptions of black people. Kendi also talks about Abraham Lincoln's stance regarding racism and slavery in this section. Lincoln primary concern was to keep the union together at all costs, without regard to the social injustices of slavery. Overall, the point Kendi makes is that racism became so ingrained in U.S. culture by the time of the Civil War that even people advocating for it end harbored such negative perceptions of blackness. As he writes in the Epilogue, "eliminating some form of racial discrimination was in their self-interest, much as President Abraham Lincoln chose to end slavery to save the union." Towards the end of Lincoln's life, Kendi does demonstrate how Lincoln changed by expressing his preference for bestowing voting rights on "the very intelligent" Blacks and Black "soldiers." Though Lincoln never truly became anti-racist, this was still the first time that a U.S. President expressed a preference for black suffrage.

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CONVERSATIONS FROM THE UNDERGROUND

A Historical Underground Interview with Eric Salas, faculty

For this edition, we at the Underground had the opportunity to catch up with TCC history professor and Underground sponsor, Eric Salas, to pick his brain for a bit in regards to the nature of history and the role it plays in our lives. You can be sure to find him at the Underground meetings this semester on Thursdays at 2pm, or in the halls of campus preparing to teach.

THU: What courses do you teach for TCC and what is your area(s) of expertise as a historian?

I teach U.S. HIST 1301, U.S. HIST 1302, and African American HIST 2381. My area of expertise would be the ideological developments of Malcolm X.

THU: In your words, what is a historian and why are they important?

"They say that in war the truth be the first casualty," so the work of a righteous historian is to protect and promote the truth. A historian critically analyzes the past. A historian reads, writes, and or speaks on past events with a critical eye, an analytical mind, and sometimes in rhyme. Historians are important because they create and correct narratives that society can accept or reject as truth. Greatness requires a narrative. Historians are important because they control the past ... "Who controls the past now, controls the future, who controls the

present now ... controls the past." We used to say that the pen is mightier than the sword and not much has changed because a historian's "pen is a *Pistola* and on the tip of my tongue is an infinite, ageless inkwell ... dipped in funk arsenic."

THU: How and why did you become a historian?

History at times can be seen as a collection of stories that society has accepted as truth. When the story never changes it can get stale and boring so I wanted to tell these stories with the rationale that "no idea is original, there is nothing new under the sun, it's never what you do, but how it's done." I decided to become a historian because I had a story to tell and I wanted to tell it my way.

THU: What is your favorite historical book or documentary, and why?

My favorite book would have to be Alex Haley's, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This book embodies a spirit of resiliency, redemption, and rebirth that was refreshing and challenging to who I was and who I wanted to be.

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Conversations From the Underground, cont.

THU: What kind of TCC activities are you involved in outside the classroom?

I currently co-sponsor two clubs on campus: The Historical Underground and the Chess Club.

THU: If you were forced with a Katana pointed at your chest to answer what you feel is the most important force or factor or theme in life that drives history, what would you say it was and why?

Power. Everything in life is a hustle ... human existence is a struggle. The desire for power and significance creates conflict because the lure of success and power validates indifference and inequality. People love and hate you for the same reason ... people love power and success, people envy those with power and success. Without envy there may not be progress, with it there will never be peace.

THU: If you could have a conversation with 1 historical figure in your life, who would it be and what would you ask them?

I would want to meet with Malcolm X and I would ask to elaborate his thoughts on the international western power structure.



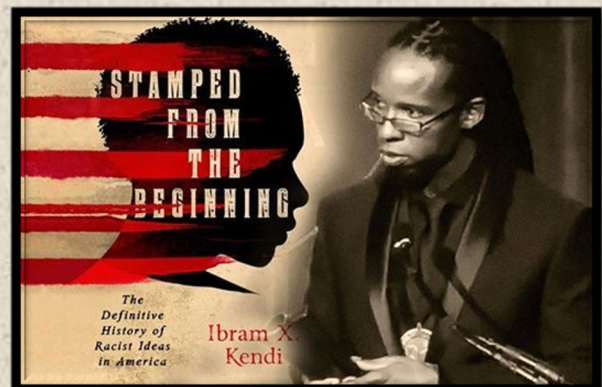
Eric Salas, Instructor of History at TCC, is one of the Founding Fathers of The Historical Underground, which he has helped build from the ground up over the past 8 years.

Historical Book Review, cont.

In Part Four: W.E.B. Du Bois, Kendi focuses on how the economy in U.S. history has kept black people in disenfranchised positions. He gives ample details on the divides and conflicts that occur within the black community, ranging from light complexion controversies and the mistreatment of biracial blacks to assimilationist arguments between thinkers like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Overall, U.S. society severely disadvantaged Black people from the start, and it continued even after they were freed from the chains of slavery. Indeed, the impact of slavery remained ingrained in American institutions, leaving many feeling helpless and captive, even though they were no longer slaves. In other words, they were still chained by laws and were unable to have a voice in anything without the fear of losing everything. While assimilationists preached liberation, they were never really anti-racist. Kendi also discusses the differences between anti-racism and abolitionism by arguing that most abolitionists were not anti-racist, just anti-slavery. Racial discrimination existed among abolitionists quite often, and many people throughout U.S. history who called themselves abolitionists had never laid eyes on a black person before in their life.

In Part Five: Angela Davis, Kendi's book revolves around a student who learned of the deaths of four of her friends in a bombing in her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. These mass murders showcased the horrifying truth of American racism. In these chapters the author speaks on the great influences of pop culture and the music industry that sprang up after the civil rights movement. He informs readers of the human genome project that took place in the 1990s, which suggested that humans were more genetically similar than racists once thought. These scientific developments challenged the centuries old ideologies of polygenesis and eugenics. Kendi also spills a great deal of ink reflecting on the fact that, despite making up only about 13 percent of the United States population, a whopping 40 percent of death row inmates consists of Black Americans. Towards the end of this section, he wrote about the Obama presidency and how the election of a black president does not mean that America is now a racist free society. Granted, although some of the whites who voted for Obama were anti-racist, others deemed the president an "extraordinary Negro." The belief of a post racial America quickly became a huge division be-

tween racists and anti-racists when Obama took office. Angela Davis said it best when she claimed, "Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages." If, as Kendi's book convincingly argues, the Jewish Holocaust was the largest documented genocide, then the Black Holocaust is the largest undocumented one. Centuries of institutional oppression and ethnic cleansing has had an everlasting effect on this country, where the policing and incarceration systems were built on anti-blackness. All five of these people whom he named the sections after played significant roles through civil rights, racism, and slavery — whether they were part of social injustices or fighting them. This book was not written to change minds, but rather to give motivation to anti-racists so that when they are speaking the truth of this nation's history, they will be well informed through Kendi's writing.



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Volume 7 Issue 1 — February 2019

"HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE"

Join Us: Thursdays /2pm/ESEE 1109

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"WE USE IT TO CONFRONT THE PAST"



Note: this literature is not official Tarrant County College District literature and does not represent the views of the Tarrant County College District or its officers.

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Once again, *Notes from the Underground* is back from a rather long hiatus. It seems like ages have unfolded since we last produced an issue in Fall of 2017. I remember that edition quite vividly, however, for I was on faculty development leave at the time when the Underground interviewed me about what I was doing with all that time. This go round, we have another Underground sponsor on sabbatical, and his essay will have you rethinking any misconceived notions that a full year off from teaching amounts to any sort of a “break” from work. Speaking from experience, I can tell you that Dr. Kosc is spot on with the insight he provides on just how busy sabbatical life can be. When it was all said and done for me, I ended up backpacking over 200 miles on the Appalachian Trail, traveling by car and plane over eight thousand miles to visit a dozen national parks and archives, and came home with over five thousand pictures of historical images I have been sifting through to include in a textbook I have been writing for my U.S. History Survey courses. I am 120 pages into that textbook now, and I can honestly say that none of it would be produced without that time allotted to me from TCC to focus on research. For me, Kosc’s words resonate strongly when he muses about the importance of sabbatical for freeing up academics to conduct the important research they need to help improve their knowledge on subjects in history. I was also able to finish up a research project monograph that has been published as an academic book during that period, which makes my experience over the past year sort of like a textbook example of the points he makes in his essay for this edition. Another sponsor for THU also contributed a piece to this edition. Although it has nothing to do with sabbatical or time off from teaching, Eric Salas’ interview does illuminate some poignant positions on the nature of history and the importance of it in our lives. Not only that, but his words are even more meaningful at this time of the year, for they bring attention to one of the most valued thinkers about the Black experience in the United States during Black History Month, which THU has been quite vocal about supporting in numerous editions we have produced in the past. To complement this focus on black history and the role that Malcolm X has played in inspiring Salas’ academic career—as well as the rich new research on Black history that Kosc writes about in his essay—our very own Historical Underground member, Despina, has provided a solid overview of a book that has been making some waves as of late. *Stamped from the Beginning* is a timely study that provides a wonderful assessment of the black experience in the Atlantic World, and this book review helps articulate why. We hope that it will inspire you to read the book, and that the other two articles will get you thinking about the value of history and the importance of keeping your mind sharp to develop new knowledge out of the human experience in the world. If you are searching for more intellectual nourishment, then you can catch one or more of the several presentations that The Historical Underground is sponsoring this month for the Black History Lecture Series. Kicking off with a presentation by the president of the Underground, Somari Tobin, on Feb. 7 called “The McFly Effect” regarding the rift between rock music and black culture, it will then follow with a lecture by our department chair, Mike Downs, who also teaches history classes on campus and is a long-time friend of the Underground. His presentation revolves around the extension of slavery after the 13th Amendment, which established a new form of enslavement that came to be known as convict leasing. Then, on Feb. 14, I will present a lecture on Fred Hampton as a revolutionary in the United States, and the next week on Feb. 21 Eric Salas will give us his knowledge on Black Nationalism and the role Malcolm X played in sustaining that ideology in the United States. All of these lectures begin at 2pm on these days. Of course, all of you are more than welcome to join us at the Underground any week this semester, which is the best place to be on campus from 2-3:20pm every Thursday this semester in room ESEE 1109. Be there, get heard, and/or start listening!

~ Bradley J. Borougerdi