

Notes from the Underground

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THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND

For Freedom or Fascism?

By: Mateo Hernandez, Student

When it comes to fascism, a couple specific nations come to mind. Germany, Italy, and Spain dominated the headlines for this reason during the World War II Era, but the United States should also stand as an exemplar of fascism as well. Anyone who has seen “Days of Waiting: The Life and Art of Estelle Ishigo” could hardly disagree, for it demonstrates how the actions and tenor of the United States towards Japanese Americans during World War II reflect typical indicators of a fascist government/society.

To begin, it is imperative to understand what form a fascist government takes, as well as how it might operate. For one, they almost always emphasize cultural homogeneity, scapegoating racism, and the absolute authority of state power. These governments often appeal to a sense of loss among their citizenry – whether it be feelings of lost power and/or privilege amongst the majority, or some grander sense of lost national greatness. Another factor of fascist governments is the empowerment of an authoritarian leader with a deep reverence for the military and a militarized police force that ‘otherizes’ people within society. These ‘others’ tend to consist of minorities, those with disabilities, and political dissenters. Those within the ‘otherized’ group get

blamed for the loss of national identity or greatness, and thus become viewed with intense suspicion.

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, as fascism gained popularity in Germany, Italy, and Spain – under Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, respectively – the United States positioned itself as a staunch anti-fascist power. Not only did President Roosevelt speak out against the actions of these fascist regimes, but his government provided tremendous material aid and financial support to those European powers that had officially become engaged in war with fascism in 1939 after Hitler invaded Poland. Granted, the United States remained committed to not joining this war, but on December 7th, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. As a result, the U.S. declared war on Japan, which in turn prompted Germany and Italy to declare war on them. By December 11, the United States was fully engaged in a war against fascism.

The ironic tragedy of all this is that, because of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, public sentiment turned sharply against Japanese nationals, immigrants, and citizens. Fueled by government actions, individuals with as little as a 1/16th Japanese

ancestry were viewed with suspicion. The fascist tendency to ‘otherize’ a group for purposes of safeguarding national integrity became strong across the United States, with pejorative views of Japanese Americans being spies and traitors developing rapidly. Despite having found no evidence of Japanese Americans spying or engaging in subterfuge for Japan, U.S. Americans thought they were too sneaky and cunning to be caught and could thus not be allowed to remain at-large in society.

Such was the historical context when, in February of 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which “...authorized the evacuation of all persons deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centers further inland.” This order classified over 100,000 individuals of Japanese descent within the US as threats to national security and relocated them to “internment camps” within the U.S. He had just won a third term as president two years earlier, and he was immensely charismatic, so many people supported the act. In effect, the whole situation mirrored the way in which Nazi Germany had set up the removal of its ‘undesirable elements’ from their society. A powerfully impactful picture of the effects of this order can be seen in the documentary, “Days of Waiting: The Life and Art of Estelle Ishigo.” This film follows the story of a white woman who chose to endure, and document, the hardship and indignity of living in a Japanese internment

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What's that Sound: A Brief History of the Great-Tailed Grackle

By: Caleb Hinojos, Former TCC Student and THU Emeritus

For most Dallas Fort Worth residents, a trip to the grocery store or local eatery almost always guarantees two things. The first is that you are most likely going to have to drive there, and the second is that, either while in route or once you arrive, you are bound to see a black bird or a group of them being quite raucous. To scientists, these birds are known as *Quiscalus mexicanus*, but to most people they are grackles. In Texas we have three species of grackles, but the most common and seemingly ubiquitous one is the Great-Tailed Grackle. This, however, has not always been the case, and their history of immigration to the United States has been helped immensely by the citizenry, albeit inadvertently. To better understand this phenomenon, it is important to know a little bit about their life history.

Q. mexicanus originally evolved in Central America. Much like its sister species the Boat-Tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus major*, it needs to have access to standing water. Unlike *Q. major*, however, it has evolved so that it could live outside of coastal wetlands and colonize the interior of its territories. This adaptation provided them with a wide range of new places to migrate to and begin establishing colonies. A second reason this bird has done so well is due to its omnivorous diet. Depending on the time of year they can adapt their diet. In spring and summer, they are known to increase their consumption of animals, which include spiders, worms, grasshoppers, snails, moths, and many others. This seasonal diet coin-

cides with their breeding season and the need for more calcium content to produce viable eggs, but to also ensure their young get enough protein to develop properly and have a high chance at fledging. Their year-round diet includes plant matter such as cultivated grains and fruits. The most crucial characteristic for their range expansion is their ability to fly. To someone who is not accustomed to watching birds, this may seem like an odd thing to point out because almost all birds fly, but not all flight is equal. Grackles are particularly powerful flyers and can travel a good distance at a time. These characteristics aside, a fourth and unlikely trait helped them in their transition away from the coast over 500 years ago.

This first colonization of interior lands was recorded by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in the late 15th century in the Mexican Basin where modern-day Mexico City is located. In his book on the Florentine Codex, he states that emperor Ahuitzotl ordered the bird to be brought in due to the beautiful iridescence of their feathers. Due to the different species that lived in the area - which could outcompete the grackles for resources - this task would mean continually going back and forth from the coasts and bringing the birds in. However, due to the rise of famous Aztec city Tenochtitlan, agriculture had become much more important for maintaining the human population. The preferred method of growing food was the chinampa, which is a raised garden bed of mud and vegetation built on a lake. By changing the habitat to include large bodies of standing water, it

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FOR FREEDOM OR FASCISM, CONTINUED...

camp with her Japanese husband, Arthur Ishigo. Estelle and Arthur Ishigo were a married couple living in California when they were shunned by society after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Arthur lost his janitorial job at Paramount Pictures due to his Japanese heritage, and Estelle was fired as a teacher because she had a Japanese last name. This was not uncommon at the time, especially since the Western Defense Command placed all Japanese Americans under "protective arrest." The coercive power of the state was used to round up and force families of Japanese ancestry onto buses, where they were only allowed 100 lbs. of luggage to bring with them. All other material possessions, including their homes and cars, were to be left as they were loaded onto buses to be taken to temporary camps.

Arthur and Estelle Ishigo were part of a group that were bussed to the Pomona Assembly Center Temporary Detention Camp. Here, Estelle began documenting the conditions faced by the peoples relegated to these camps through her photography and free-hand artwork. In the documentary, we see firsthand accounts of Japanese families being reduced to number-identifiers imposed upon them by camp processing personnel. These people (women, children, and men) were forced to live in barracks-filled camps ringed with barbed wire, complete with machine-gun-clad watchtowers and armed guards. The detainees were forced to work long hours with no pay to maintain the camps. Not only that, but these Japanese people faced extreme weather conditions and were often malnourished. In fact, on one documented occasion, evidence reveals that the meat supply for Pomona Center was diverted by camp personnel and sold outside the camp instead of being supplied to the camp populace.

After spending some time in the Pomona Center, Arthur and Estelle were then shipped by railcar to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. This camp had a population of about 12,000 people who were packed into a one square mile tract of land. It is here that Arthur and Estelle spent the rest of the

war - with Arthur shoveling coal into camp boilers until on November 10, 1945, when the Ishigo family was allowed to leave their internment as a result of the war ending two months prior. As a parting concession, Arthur and Estelle were given \$25.00 and transportation fare upon leaving the camp. In the film, Estelle Ishigo shows the immense physical toll that this internment had taken on her husband, Arthur; showing pictures of how he had aged beyond his years while in those camps. In 1952, the Ishigos were offered a settlement by the US government of \$100.00 for their time in the internment camps. \$100.00! Despite four years of letter-writing and outreach by Estelle Ishigo to get more compensation (they had to leave behind over \$1000.00 worth of belongings when they entered the camp), the Ishigos finally accepted a settlement of \$102.50 in 1956. A year later, in 1957, Arthur passed away due to cancer, likely caused by the unsafe work he was forced to endure while interned at the camps. Afterwards, Estelle lived in poverty for the rest of her life until she passed away in February of 1990.

When this story is taken into consideration, it illuminates the parallels between the United States and the fascist regimes of Europe (especially Germany). These societies fetishized national glory, became xenophobic and "otherized" or scapegoated populations of people who were not seen as part of the dominant social group. They utilized legal authority to displace and concentrate these populations in undignified and harmful conditions. They reduced individuals to numbers and forcibly transported living, breathing human beings like cattle - just human freight to be uprooted and moved and treated without full human compassion and dignity. For a nation purportedly fighting against fascism on the European continent while simultaneously engaging in the fascist practices of their enemies at home is a historical tragedy of utmost concern. The United States has long had issues pertaining to the application of law and human rights to minority groups, but to see how low the nation sank in the 1940s with Japanese

White Lives Matter, Part I

By: Bradley J. Borougerdi, Faculty

In the weeks leading up to April 11, 2021, rumor had it that “White Lives Matter” rallies were being planned in cities across the United States for that day. Fort Worth was one of them, where city hall served as the destination for a feeble turnout. I first heard of these plans about a week earlier and, for some reason, could not stop thinking about the people who intended to show up. Perhaps it’s because I had been volunteering for the Fort Worth Lynching Tour lately and wanted to measure the potential threat the participants could be facing, but my mind kept drifting towards wondering about who they would be, where they would come from, and how their lives might have developed from childhood till now. I wondered about how such people had come to see the world through such a narrow cultural lens, why they think of people like me as a problem because of my mixed cultural heritage, or what exactly they meant by stating on their event flyer that white people are being “victimized” because of their skin color. One thing I have learned in life so far is that it is very hard to decipher the toll that navigating through different social landscapes can have on another human being – or even on our own selves, for that matter – which makes it difficult to find answers to the questions that were bugging me.

After all, how are we supposed to change someone’s mind about something that is deeply misguided, plainly irrational, and truly dangerous, for example, when that person does not even understand their own belief or why they believe it? David Foster Wallace once referred to this type of close-mindedness as “an imprisonment so total that the prisoner doesn’t even know he is locked up.” This pretty much sums up the experience I had with talking to one of the five people who showed up in support of the buffoonery they advertised as a “PEACEFUL MARCH FOR OUR FUTURE.” Yes, just five... one of the only silver linings in the experience of this day for the City of Fort Worth. Honestly, I thought there would be far more attendees, and that I would just sit back and observe their behavior as I pro-

cessed my thoughts, maybe pick a few of them off from the edges who I could talk some sense into with a bit of the ol’ educational oration I had missed delivering since the pandemic moved our college courses to asynchronous online platforms. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

When I think about the couple of hours or so that I spent talking at the man who tried to “inform” me, among other glib claims, about all the problems that probably exist in my life because of what he called my “mixed race heritage” (I think that’s how he put it), Wallace’s words pulse through my mind. How can you free a prisoner who does not even know they are locked up? How can you not see that White Lives Matter means something entirely different than Black Lives Matter? Most everybody knows that white lives matter. I know that white lives matter. We know that white lives matter. He obviously knew that white lives matter. This country knows that white lives matter. There is not a national problem surrounding the notion that the lives of white people matter in the United States of America. Never has been. If you think that there is, then it must be because you are worried about the same thing this man explained to me that he is worried about. You are worried about the existence of people like me, which you somehow feel is a corruption of your race. Because my mother is white, she has somehow contaminated *your* heritage by procreating with a brown man born on the other side of the Atlantic who should not have been allowed to enter *your* land. You fear that this will ultimately result in the end of whiteness and the privileges that come with it. “Blood and soil,” he mentioned in one of his diatribes. “Blood and soil.” Does he know the significance of this phrase? To be continued...

Note: the second half of this article will be published in the next edition of NFTU, so stay tune for the next edition

What's that Sound, continued . . .

allowed for the grackles to have the water they needed, along with plenty of plenty of food year-round. Not only that, but they could also fly throughout the empire’s agricultural areas to dine on fruits and grains, as well as the insects that fed on the crops. This initial colonization inland did, however, run its course when the Spanish arrived and destroyed Tenochtitlan in 1521. Many natives left the area or succumbed to disease. As the human population decreased, so did the grackles. Although the inland migrations stopped, the grackles moved their way up the coast and eventually made it to North America.

The earliest available records place the species as a south Texas resident whose range extended up to Corpus Christi. At the time, the U.S. Civil War had been over for almost two decades and a large majority of the human population was still east of the Mississippi river. This, however, would change in the 20th century as more and more citizens moved west and began to establish cities, which brought the necessary changes to the land that were needed to accommodate their growing populations. *Q. mexicanus* was not far behind. Through the 1930s their population was only known in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Although they were not documented as breeding yearly in the areas, oologists did find evidence that proved some colonies had success. Still, it wasn’t until the 1950s that the birds would eventually make it out of these states and continue their northern expansion. The second half of the 20th century is when the bird increased its range quite rapidly, and by the late 1990s there were reported sightings at the Canadian border. The same pattern that the Mexican natives had seen the grackle populations grow alongside their cities and agricultural components, had also been witness by the U.S. Americans. Although the use of chinampas

did not appear in North America, the use of freshwater reservoirs for cities did. Couple that with the many suburbs that opened more of the birds’ nesting preferences, and once again the grackle found a situation in which to thrive. In addition, many bird enthusiasts started placing bird feeders on their lawns, while gardeners continued to grow plants that were either an edible resource for the Grackle or provided a home for their insect meals. In other words, this all combined to allow the bird to reside alongside us, and it demonstrates just how strong of a benefit flight is for a species. Since *Q. mexicanus* is a tropical bird, it has not evolved with the temperature fluctuations that are experienced this far north, but it can move freely over long distances and use our cities as islands of refuge and meet all its requirements for breeding. Much like the dog, the grackle has a past that is closely linked to human settlement. Given its great adaptability, it will most likely continue to have a future that is interwoven with that of humans.



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“HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE”

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome back for the first time! We at The Historical Underground are proud to bring you our first edition of *Notes From the Underground* in the year 2022. Due to COVID, The Historical Underground went deeper underground until we could resurface face-to-face. Since that hiatus, we have had to destroy and rebuild the organization. Long-time co-conspiring sponsors, Dr. Greg Kosci and Joel To-vanche, went off to greener pastures, leaving O.G. founders Eric Salas and Dr. Bradley Borougerdi to seek new recruits. With that being said, allow us to introduce NyJae McKeel as President, Mateo Hernandez as Vice-President, Dhieu Manyang as Minister of Propaganda, and Han Jang as Secretary. They are an excellent cadre of leaders to bring this organization back to the surface of thought at a time when thought is deeply needed. We welcome their presence and look forward to where they will take us.

In this edition of *Notes*, we have a lot going on. Dhieu Manyang has revamped the image of this organization, which you all will see more of in the near future. Mateo Hernandez kicks us off from the start with his first contribution, which was inspired by a documentary he watch in a history class he is taking this semester. His thoughts on the relationship between fascism and the United States is particularly poignant at this moment in time, so pay attention to what he has to say. Then, for the first time in Underground history, we have a serendipitous submission from a former THU member, officer, writer, and now UTA graduate, Caleb Hinojos. Despite having went off to bigger and better things in life, Caleb remains a dedicated Undergrunder and prove it with his interesting article relating to the environmental history of the Great-Tailed Grackle and its presence in urban landscapes. And one of our sponsors/editors/Underground Pro-vocateur wraps up this addition with part one of an article he wrote over his experiences at a white lives matter rally in Fort Worth that he attended during the pandemic. Be on the look out for the next edition to read the rest of it, along with a few others we already have lined up. Yes, we are, indeed, back into the swing of things!

We also want to remind every student, faculty, and staff member of this campus to get involved, take action, and be heard. The Historical Underground is our vehicle for action, *Notes from the Underground* is our mouthpiece for disseminating knowledge. History is our weapon for change. WE AT THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND WANT YOU! WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK! If you are interested in writing for this publication, all you have to do is email: bradley.borougerdi@tccd.edu or eric.salas@tccd.edu and we will guide you through the process. Again, thank you for taking the time to read our publication. If you are interested in joining The Historical Underground, we are holding meetings every Monday at 11a.m. in room ESEE 1119 this semester. Peace be with you all.

~ Editors from the Underground