

Notes from the Underground

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THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND

Values Destroyed, to Defend Values

By: Karuna Thapa, Current TCC Student

The September 2025 youth-led protest in Nepal, described in media and public discourse as the “Gen Z protest,” presents us with a tragic paradox that sometimes occurs in history: when a society tries to defend its cultural values, it ends up destroying them. As a Nepali living in the United States during this movement, I experienced these events from afar through social media footage, news reports, and conversations with people back home. Witnessing this unsettled me as the revolution my parents once spoke of was no longer just stories from the past; it was happening again, with greater consequences affecting every Nepali, at home and abroad.

On the morning of September 9, I woke up to reports and the uncensored visuals of students being killed in the streets of New Baneshwar, Kathmandu. Many had been shot in their college uniforms. The next morning, more footage emerged, only this time it was mostly of those who had been convicted of corruption being chased while government offices were being set on fire. Chaos spread through the streets in the span of just two days, and events escalated far beyond what could have been anticipated. What had seemed to begin as a movement for equality, justice, freedom of expression, and transparency had devolved into a moral crisis. Watching all of this unfold from afar got me thinking about the decline in societal values that comes with widespread moral confusion.

Initially, this movement emerged among young citizens who used digital platforms to challenge elitism, nepotism, and the absence of meritocracy. Most notably, these digital activists launched a social media campaign through the TikTok trend “#nepobaby,” which exposed the luxurious

lifestyles of political leaders and their families. Tensions escalated further after the government imposed a social media ban instead of taking accountability for rampant corruption. By attempting to suppress the freedom of expression for the Nepali youth, the government highlighted a structural strain that existed between its citizens' expectations and the institutional behavior of the state. In response, digital critiques flooded the internet, which helped mobilize the youthful masses of Nepal. The stage had been set for the collapse of social order and people lost trust in governmental institutions.

The mass mobilization seems to have reached its peak on September 8, 2025, when thousands of youths (mostly students) gathered at Maitighar Mandala and marched towards the federal parliament building in central Kathmandu, chanting slogans against corruption, calling for freedom, and fighting for justice. A big concern that they expressed pertained to their values being violated, so the protestors claimed moral legitimacy by opposing nepotism and demanding transparent governance. Reflecting Nepal's civic tradition, the protest was supposed to be peaceful, but state security forces opened fire on unarmed civilians. At least 19 were killed, and more than a hundred youth, including many students, were injured. The whole event turned out to be a nightmare for many families that watched as their children were shot dead in public. At this stage, public sympathy overwhelmingly favored the protesters, with the state being perceived to have violated its ethical obligation to protect citizens.

On the second day of protest, however, despair and outrage led many of the citizens involved to abandon their moral boundaries, marking a clear moral breakdown in the movement. Protesters, fueled by the previous day's violence, targeted political elites and institutions, setting government offices, party headquarters, and Singha Durbar on fire. Political leaders were pursued, humiliated, beaten, hospitalized, and in some cases killed. Videos of the violence spread rapidly, which created a collective trauma that affected the national conscience. Ordinary citizens like wage laborers who had nothing to do with the corruption were attacked and suffered as their homes and livelihoods were destroyed. Amid this chaos, the movement's original commitment to justice, freedom, and equality was overshadowed by violence, vengeance, and destruction.

The loss of innocent lives remains the deepest tragedy. Students and youth, who should have been safe in schools and public spaces, were shot dead, leaving families shattered and communities grieving. Both the protesters and political leaders failed to uphold ethical principles, and their ac-

tions serve as a haunting reminder that the defense of values without moral restraint erodes the very foundations of humanity and social responsibility.

Was there an alternative way to demand justice, equality, and accountability without descending into violence? Historically, Nepal's major political transformations have emerged through mass movements that combined popular participation with moral discipline and organizational clarity. The 1990 People's Movement and the nationwide, pro-democracy protest in 2006 called *Jana Andolan*, both mobilized broad segments of society while maintaining a commitment to Nepali values. However imperfect they may have been, these movements promoted non-violent, collective restraint and negotiated outcomes, and their leadership structure contained clear political objectives that included institutional engagement. As such, these movements were able to translate public pressure into constitutional change without a widespread collapse of ethical boundaries.

In contrast, the Gen Z movement operated in a fragmented political and digital environment. The absence of leadership, negotiation frameworks, and accountability structures resulted in an inability to regulate behavior or prevent violent retaliation when state violence occurred. This does not mean the protestors' demands were illegitimate, however. On the contrary, their moral claims were justified. The tragedy lies in the fact that state violence shattered their moral grounding, and retaliatory violence then destroyed it all. When protesters targeted not only institutions but also individuals, the movement's ethical clarity began to dissolve. Justice became vengeance; accountability became punishment; freedom became destruction, and 76 people lost their lives. Martin Luther King famously said that “violence begets violence,” which this atrocity seems to demonstrate.

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Antoinette Brown Blackwell: First Woman Minister

By: Mike Downs, Faculty

With the victory over the British in the War of 1812, the United States entered what historians refer to as the Era of Reform. There was a new sense of pride and optimism that the US could accomplish anything. An explosion of reform movements swept across the nation. Andrew Jackson benefitted from political reforms such as removing the property requirement to vote. This increased voter participation from the election of 1824 in which approximately 300,000 men voted, compared to over 1.6 million men who cast a ballot in the election of 1828. This revolutionary idea of democracy dramatically expanded. For the first time, a true market economy developed. Coupled with new steamboat technology, this allowed the US to undergo the first transportation revolution. The way we moved people and goods around the country changed and it all centered on rivers and canals. In 1825, the largest public works project yet attempted opened for business: the Erie Canal. The newly constructed man-made river connected the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and then down to New York City. If anything is responsible for transforming New York into the commercial and financial center of the US, it was the Erie Canal. In that same year, Antoinette Brown Blackwell was born. No woman anywhere had ever been ordained as a priest or minister. Antoinette Brown Blackwell would be the first.

She was born Antoinette Louisa Brown in May of 1825 in rural Upstate New York to parents Joseph and Eliza Brown. One of ten children, Blackwell grew up in a deeply religious household, with an upbringing inspired by the Second Great Awakening and a fiery preacher named Charles Grandison Finney. An itinerant self-taught lawyer-turned-preacher, Finney held revival meetings across the country. He preached a new type of Christianity that focused on God's mercy and compassion, as well as the goodness and kindness of people. Traditional or "orthodox" Christianity tended to promote fear of God through punishment, so his approach was quite innovative at the time. Young Antoinette was spared the damnation and brimstone that was so common. She was influenced and shaped by compassion and love, with her grandmother showing the young Antoinette a side of religious life and study that was distinct from the typical clergyman of the day. Her grandmother shared with her a deep love of Scripture, but also a deeper love of religious study and education.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell entered formal education when she was three years old. Education would be a guiding pillar her entire life. Growing up on a semi-frontier, Blackwell had opportunities that she would not have experienced in a city like Boston or New York. There were less constraints on folks in general, and women specifically, on a frontier. Young Antoinette attended the Monroe Academy. During one particularly harsh winter, she and some other children stayed in a house near the school, for the entire term, largely

unsupervised by adults. Frontiers have a way of encouraging resilience, self-reliance, and often unconventional thinking. Blackwell completed her studies at the Monroe Academy and began her education at Oberlin College in 1846. Oberlin was a college that believed in equal education for men and women, as well as black Americans. Many leaders of the abolitionist movement were educated at Oberlin College. In 1848, after completing the literary course at Oberlin, Blackwell began studying theology. She graduated from Oberlin College in 1850 with a degree in theology but no license to preach. She wrote abolitionist pieces in Frederick Douglass' *North Star* and spoke at the first National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, Mass. But her passion was in religious education. She was granted a preaching license by the Congregationalist Church in 1851 and hired as a pastor in South Butler, NY. There, she was ordained as a minister by a somewhat radical Methodist preacher named Luther Lee on Sept 15, 1853.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell would go on to have a prolific public speaking career. She lectured at almost every National Woman's Rights Convention and spoke out as an abolitionist who supported the temperance and suffragist movements, all while continuing her ministerial work and raising a family of five children. She married Samuel Charles Blackwell in 1856. What is perhaps most remarkable in her story is that she was also a brilliant author of scientific studies, publishing *Studies in General Science* in 1869 and her most successful book, *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, in 1875. In it, she takes to task the ideas presented in Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), as well as Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Biology* (1872). Out of these books came ideas of evolution, natural selection, and competition amongst species. Spencer coined the phrase, "Survival of the Fittest." Blackwell was one of the first people to identify what is now known as androcentrism in scientific methodology, which is a term that refers to the inherent biases of a male exclusive perspective. While Darwin and Spencer emphasized speed, strength, and muscle as inherently superior to the females of a species, Blackwell pointed out how the reproductive system of a lioness was far more complex than the mane and muscle of a lion. Many females of a species are, in fact, larger and stronger than males (we all know about the mating rituals of the Praying Mantis). While androcentrism emphasized competition, Blackwell's perspective focused on cooperation, which most species rely on for survival.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell was a pioneering woman on the religious, social, and scientific frontiers of 19th-century America. She was the first ordained woman in the United States and a long standing suffragette who cast a vote in the presidential election of 1920 for the first time.



An image of Antoinette Brown Blackwell and a building from the campus of Oberlin College, where she attended.



Conversations with History: An Interview with Jose Velarde

By: Editors from Underground

THU: What do you do for TCC and how long have you been doing it?

JV: I am an instructor of psychology and I started teaching as an adjunct here in 2008.

THU: Why do you keep doing the job that you do here? What motivates you to do it?

JV: I have a passion for understanding the world, particularly people. All the topics in psychology relate to the human experience, so sharing this with students is motivating for me.

THU: How would you define history, and why do you think history is important?

JV: Human experience is grounded in our evolutionary and socio-cultural past. Understanding ourselves and the contexts in which we evolved, grow, and experience life is fundamental. History provides that rich tapestry of context, so it's integral.

THU: What about culture? How would you define that, and why do you think it is important?

JV: Very much like the answer above. We are social animals and culture is inherently social – it shapes the behaviors, beliefs, and values that we share.

THU: If you had to boil down what it is about humanity that most accurately captures why we do what we do, what would you say that is and why?

JV: Human connection, sharing unique experiences and knowledge with others and also learning from the unique experiences of others.

THU: In all of the travels you have done in your life, what is something you think you could say about the human experience that you found present in all of these places?

JV: No matter how different cultural practices are, people want to live and to have a happy life and for most happiness comes from meaningful interpersonal connections.



Professor Jose Velarde has been with TCC for longer than *Notes from the Underground* has existed

THU: What is it about the things you study in your academic life that you think is so important that all students should study it? Why do you think this?

JV: I would say greater understanding of statistics and research methods. I know it's technical and not a student favorite, but basic understanding of probability, distributions and how experimental psychologists make systemic observations about the world is vitally important for critical thinking—one of the goals of higher education.

THU: If you had to reduce everything it is that you think went in to making you who you are today, what would you say that is and why?

JV: My father. I vividly remember the conversations we had, typically at bedtime when I was younger, about life lessons, history, and stories from his youth. I think much of my passion for learning, sports, traveling, and so much more came from these conversations. He was always open-minded and kind, and it still resonates with me to this day, and I try to emulate this in life and in my teaching.

THU: If you could sit down with one historical figure to have a meal with them, who would it be, what would you choose to eat, and what questions would you want to address with that person?

JV: This response might be a little cliché, but it would be Mahatma Gandhi. One of the first movies I ever remember watching was Gandhi (1982) with my dad and it absolutely had a huge impact on me. Reading about his philosophies and experiences is one thing, but hearing the stories over a meal would be something else. Speaking of meals, another reason I would pick Gandhi is that I love Indian food – samoas and chicken curry are my favorites!!

THU: If you had to be the goal keeper for a penalty kick coming at you from Lionel Messi, and were given the chance to say one thing to him before he strikes, what would you say?

JV: Haha this might be the toughest question of all. I would have very little hope of saving a penalty from Messi, so I would say “bottom right” and hope it has a subtle or not so subtle psychological effect of him still attempting to place the ball there in his arrogance.

*VALUES DESTROYED, TO DEFEND VALUES,
CONTINUED . . .*

“The loss of innocent lives remains the deepest tragedy . . .”

Indeed, as King's work – and Mahatma Gandhi's work before him – so eloquently revealed, nonviolent protest was the only viable response to the state's violence. Granted, it is difficult to act successfully when a state government does not contain the enabling conditions for nonviolence to work (such as the state's desire to follow public opinion or uphold a sense of moral authority), and in the context of the Gen Z case, those conditions did not exist. This meant that a nonviolent alternative was not likely to gain traction, thereby making the escalation of violence less a deliberate choice by the protesters than a structural outcome of Nepali society at the time.

At the core of these events is a troubling reality. Yes, political change occurred, with the resignation of the prime minister and the establishment of an interim government. However, if political reform follows violence, it risks normalizing violence as an acceptable means of change. Over time, this desensitization erodes respect for human life and weakens moral boundaries. Justice cannot arise from violence, making it essential to revisit and reaffirm moral restraint in political movements. Even when the structural conditions of a society are not conducive towards non-violent action, we owe it to ourselves to try, so that we do not lose our values for the sake of power, which Bob Marley once alluded to when he sang, “Don't gain the world but lose your soul, wisdom is better than silver and gold.”

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"HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE"

Join the Underground!

Contact: Bradley.borougerdi@tccd.edu

Eric.salas@tccd.edu

Michael.Downs@tccd.edu

www.thehistoricalunderground.com



"USE IT TO CONFRONT THE PAST"

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

We ... are ... back ... In full swing. Thank you for taking the time to pick up and read *Notes from the Underground* (NFTU)! We have been around the block for 15+ years now and are proud to announce our newest class of (Underground official) officers for our organization, The Historical Underground President Katelyn Quenichet, Co-Vice Presidents Sammy Mosioma and Maddie Atwood, Historian Rowan Longenbaugh, and Minister of Propaganda Leslie Zacarias. We meet every Friday at 11am at The Center for History and Culture (CHC). Joins us for some lively and invigorating conversations. All are welcome.

The Center for History and Culture (CHC) is a space for individuals who are interested in fostering a community for learning and discussing the simple yet intricate dance between history and culture. The plan is for faculty and staff to support students as they explore facts, ideas, and thoughts over a wide array of academic disciplines. The CHC has the potential to be an umbrella agency that supports a variety of disciplines like History, Philosophy, Art, Sociology, Government, Economics, Geography, Environmental Sciences ... the possibility for interdisciplinary action feels infinite. At the CHC, you will find a treasure trove of artifacts and documents in a multitude of mediums that represent history and culture in some capacity. I remember leaving the office and noticed two new visitors to the CHC, so I introduced myself to them and introduced them to the CHC. They had no clue they were at the CHC, so I had to put them on game. The two young men were both playing Magic: The Gathering – “the world’s first trading card game, featuring artwork and rules for spells or land.” We had a good yet brief discussion on the cultural impact of the card game. They were a bit surprised to know that the fun-game they played in passing could be seen as culturally significant. It was cool to meet them, and they are welcome back to the CHC anytime. The CHC is located right outside the offices of Dr. Bradley J. Borougerdi and Eric Salas (SE06 3125A). These two faculty members are the founders of The Historical Underground (THU) - the historical society at the Southeast campus, *NFTU* - the official publication for THU, and “Conversations from the Underground,” - a “podcast” of sorts between Dr. Borougerdi and Mr. Salas.

In this edition that comes fresh off the press during Women’s History Month, one of our Underground faculty sponsors, Mike Downs, delivers a brief historical biography of a trailblazing woman who stood out as a powerful voice for all women seeking the respect and dignity they have always deserved—a chance to participate in the body politic of the nation. Her story is inspiring, to say the least. A current TCC student, Karuna Thapa, provides some reflections on her experiences with a protest movement that emerged in her homeland of Nepal last year, and TCC’s veteran psychology professor, Jose Velarde, answered some questions that the editors of *The Underground* were curious to know. All three reflect the wonderful community of quality intellectualism that exists in small pockets throughout our campus. Two of them come from established scholars who’ve been contributing to instilling a deep culture of learning for decades, while the other stems from the bright young mind of a student who will - in the opinion of one of the *NFTU* editors whose class she is in right now—eventually go on to become a successful diplomat in an international organization like the UN. Yes, despite the ChatBot Revolution that has disillusioned many scholars around the world, there is still hope for humanity. Thank you all again, and please help us foster the love for knowledge by keeping reading (real books), keeping writing (real human words), and keeping learning dear to your soul. One Love!

~ Editors from the Underground