

# Notes from the Underground

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## THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND

### Dark and Deadly: A History of Indian Boarding Schools

By: Baylee Higginbotham, Student

In January 1878, in the city of Saint Paul, Minnesota, the city's newspaper *The Saint Paul Dispatch* was purchased by a Republican, which did not sit well with the city's mostly Democrat residents. A replacement paper was immediately made called *The Saint Paul Globe*, officially becoming the city's main newspaper on January 16th. It included state, national, and international news, and the paper remained in print until 1905. By then, the state of Minnesota was well in the process of trying to remove Native peoples from their land, which the government had legalized and encouraged. During this eradication campaign of these so-called "uncivilized" people, in 1903 the paper published an article titled, "Indians Who Refuse to be Civilized." The article went on to detail a number of different reasons why the "Chippewa" people refused to go to the boarding schools that were established after the Dawes Act (1887) was passed by the United States government. The invented reality that this article discussed gut-wrenchingly highlights the depths of the inhuman treatment that Natives sustained through U.S. American colonization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The article focused primarily on the "Chippewa," who belonged to one of the largest groups of Native Peoples in the northern United States and Canada. They have had many names given to them over the centuries, but to themselves they were the *Anishinabe*, meaning "first men." Other tribes called them the *Ojibwe*, which is an Algonquin word used to describe the unique puckered seams on their moccasins that were fire-cured to waterproof the shoes. French fur traders first made contact with them in the 1640s, and it is said that the name "Chippewa" was their attempt to pronounce the name Ojibwe. For over 500 years, these people lived in North America. Following a prophecy told by tribal elders, they migrated west in search of "land where food grows on water," which is thought to be a reference to wild rice. In 1659, French explorer Daniel Duluth signed a treaty with the *Anishinabe* people. This agreement

established a shared hunting area in what would later become parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota, which allowed the *Anishinabe* a sense of security as they continued to journey West over the next 263 years.

However, the expansion of Saint Paul brought lots of turmoil. Although a treaty was signed in 1837 that established borders and rights for both Native peoples and colonizers, the Dawes Act of 1887 broke up their home territories. By 1902, many members of the tribe had lost all hope in the government following through with their agreements, so they packed up and headed to an area known as the White Earth Reservation. They had chosen to no longer fight against the reservation system the U.S. government had been pushing for, and instead decided to try and make a new life where they'd hoped to finally be left alone. Some tribal members did not back down, however, choosing instead to stay on their lands and form new villages. Led by Chief Migizi and Chief Wadena, they endured heavy waves of harassment as the U.S. government resolved to sell that land. On December 20, 1903, *The St. Paul Globe* published an article informing readers how the "Chippewa" people were a nuisance who were unwilling to give up practices taught by their outdated forefathers. The author claimed that they "refused to be civilized," using derogatory language to insinuate that the Natives were unintelligent and undeserving of the land they had been living on for centuries.

Evidently, this article was written for the white mainstream population of Saint Paul, as a "pat on the back" for the colonizers, reassuring them that they were the proper, civilized, people of God. The article spoke of the *Anishinabe* as if they were children, dependent on the government, and unable to properly care for themselves with the "annuity of [\$]5.20 [that] is paid to each of them from the government." Another part called them "nothing but a low class of gypsies [who] roam from one vicinity to another... to do almost anything except work." Clearly, such language over-

looked the reality of Native peoples who had been growing and thriving for hundreds of years, but doing so helped the colonizers to justify their continued incursion upon *Anishinabe* territory.

In order to perpetuate this narrative of the "uncivilized Indian" and validate their sense of Manifest Destiny, articles like this were necessary. They needed to believe in the myth of the undeserving savage to provide justification for encroaching upon their lands. The article smacks of a form of thinking that would fully mature into the concept of Eugenics, which was a heinous and immoral attempt to use science as tool of racial subjugation and eradication. The way the *Anishinabe* people were spoken of in this article is clearly in line with this detestable ideology that pervaded the U.S. American psyche around the turn of the century. While the entire white community of St. Paul might not have held these beliefs, the article certainly indicates how prevalent the concept of white superiority had become by then, which they reinforced through the newly minted program of establishing boarding schools for Native American children.

Boarding schools played a particularly dark and deadly part of Native Americans history on the American continent at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many considered them "the ideal instrument for absorbing people and ideologies that stood in the way of [the United States'] manifest destiny," but they were seen as harmful and dangerous to Native parents and children alike. Diseases ran rampant at most of them, with tuberculosis and trachoma being two of the most common ones. Severely abusive discipline was rampant, as well. Discipline would often come in the form of beatings, restriction of food, confinement, removing of privileges, and even sexual and corporal punishment. Native parents often protested having to send their children to these schools, sometimes with entire villages coming together to protest and refuse enrolling their kids. In some cases, police were sent to enforce these laws. However, based on the article, the boarding schools sound like a wonderful place to live. In fact, there are multiple instances where it is mentioned that attendance at the school is exclusive and sought after. At one point, the author claims that "the pupils at these schools are provided with their board and clothing at government expense, and much care has to be exercised to prevent these schools from being imposed upon by children who are not entitled to government assistance."

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"Kill the Indian, Save the Man." - Richard Pratt

## Conversations with History: A Interview with Somiari Tobin

By: Eric Salas, Faculty

*Somiari Tobin was born and raised in Arlington, TX. He is a former TCC student who is currently majoring in Ethnic Studies at TCU. During a 2014 dual-enrollment campus visit, he was introduced to The Historical Underground (THU), which he joined in 2017 after doing a short bid at Western Oregon University. Somiari said, going from a 4-year university to a community college felt like taking a step back at first, "until I got plugged into the campus through certain classes, professors, and programs." He also made it clear that, "if you were to ask me what I feel like I am most known for at TCC, it's my time with THU, Men of Color, and the Intercultural Network."*

### How did you get involved with The Historical Underground?

I transferred in from Western Oregon as a sociology major, but after taking Salas' class, I could tell I wanted to peep more game from him and that's when I got word of the next THU meeting. After attending a few meetings, I was introduced and able to hear from Dr. Borougerdi and Dr. Kosc, both sponsors of the club. With three faculty/sponsors at each meeting, each with a unique approach to their craft, it gave me the opportunity to pick and choose how to cultivate and curate my own perspectives. After attending a few meetings, it became clear that you all saw the potential for me to serve as President of the club and eventually enter a different field of academia. In the end, it was Dr. Kosc who put me on the idea of the Ethnic Studies program I'm currently in at TCU today.

### Do you remember any moments that made you feel THU was going in the right direction under your leadership as President.

As President of THU, there were many fun moments and memories; but if I had to narrow it down to one event, it would be The Black History Month Lecture Series. This academic and professional event brought forth the best elements of the club, culminating into an event that felt like everything just clicked. We were able to have intellectual discussions and presentations over subjects that mattered to members of the Underground. The Lecture Series took place once a week for the entire month, with guest lecturers from the History Department and a presentation I was able to give with a musical performance to close out the program. It was nice to give a presentation and not have to defend myself, as I was so accustomed to doing in THU. It felt amazing to finally deliver a presentation over my own research and just let it be.

### How would you describe your academic journey TCC and afterwards?

My time at TCC ran from the Spring of 2017 to the Spring of 2019, but it feels like I was there for forever. Thanks to organizations like THU, Men of Color, and the Intercultural Network—as well as mentors like Eric Salas, Bradley Borougerdi, Greg Kosc, and Larry Jefferson—I learned a lot about professionalism, how to communicate in different settings, and how to prepare myself for any type of professional or academic gymnastics necessary to get things done. At times, the discussions/debates we had at THU felt like the gladiator pit for thought ... everyone was free to speak, share ideas, develop positions, but always challenged to defend. After finishing my degree at TCC, transferring was not an easy path. It was filled with many hurdles that generally affect this generation: planning, timing, and of course costs. Before eventually finding myself at TCU, I was fortunate to land a staff position for the Intercultural Network and this is where I began to sharpen my organizational/professional sword. I started off as a student in the Mentorship Program of the Intercultural Network and ended up as a Coordinator for the program by the end of my TCC tenure. It meant the world to me to know I was trusted and believed in to run that program and hopefully change lives in ways that mine was changed ... I'm still incredibly thankful to Larry Jefferson for giving me that opportunity.

### What would you like to do with your field of study?

If you would have asked me that question a year ago, I would have told you with certainty that I wanted to become a professor, but it's a little more up in the air now. Not that it is no longer my passion, but maybe it's my current scene, or seeing a great deal of my mentors drop like flies, the emotional labor and expectations may not be for me. Currently, I have a job offer lined up that starts in January. I know for the immediate future I plan on working to pay off some of my student loan debt and maybe pursue graduate school after that. The job offer is in the field of sustainability, which has been my minor at TCU.

Now that I think about it, sustainability as a whole has always been an interest for me. Funny enough, one of the things I was always involved with at TCC was sustainability. A chance conversation at TCU over sustainability led to a job offer shortly thereafter, which I am excited about pursuing.

### Is there a class that you are taking right now that you enjoy and is forming new thoughts for you?

No but with a caveat. I am not a traditional student here at TCU and there is little I was not exposed to intellectually from my time at TCC and in THU. However, there is this class called "Sex, the Body, and US Borders," though—which explores sexual citizenship and our current US border situations. It is a solid class that encourages discussion and thought, but many of the students are young and new to that type of learning environment, whereas I was able to sharpen my sword a bit with the help of my experience from THU.

### What do you like to do for fun?

This may make me sound like a nerd but I really enjoy the history of things I'm interested in. I love comedy, I love wrestling, I'm into gaming more or less but more so on the history of its development. I enjoy watching stand-up and used to do stand-up when I started at TCC. Of course, I also enjoy a good documentary here and there.

### If you could have lunch with any historical figure, who would it be with and what would you eat?

I would love to break bread with Jesus Christ! We are gonna have fish po'boys! My second would be Stan Hanson, a great territorial wrestler back in the day. We're having BBQ sandwiches and brisket, no doubt.

### If you could fight any historical figure, who would it be and why?

Assuming most of these cats don't have hands, I'd say Ronald Reagan can get it. Reagan was Hollywood, so he is gonna try to protect his face, but I'll have a game plan in place.

### What is your favorite historical book or movie, and why?

Historical book would be *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, by Joshua Bloom. My current historical film would be "LBJ" with Brian Cranston. It was a really good watch, but Anthony Mackie as Martin Luther King was the most ridiculous thing ever; they need to stop casting that man in biopics.

### What advice would you give students desiring to follow a career in academia? Any surprises, any regrets, proud moments?

There will never be a better mutual aid system you get to experience than the community college system you are currently in. There are so many resources, whether they be academic, financial, or even access to a food pantry. There are all these things to take advantage of and at many times may be right in front of you. Obviously keep your grades up, but also try to get involved early and often, use your resources, have a good time, and enjoy yourself because after this, the real-world will still be here waiting for you to join.



## White Lives Matter?, Part II

By: Bradley J. Borougerdi, Faculty

**Note:** *the first half of this article was published in the previous edition of NFTU, so search around for a stray copy of Vol. 8, Issue 1 to read it if you haven't yet.*

“Blood and Soil,” he said to me.

Is it naïve to think this man did not know the history of that phrase? He used “Ad Hominem” in response to me charging him with a grave sense of ignorance, which he could not define when I asked him what it meant. He also proved to be woefully ignorant when it came to the Age of Exploration and European colonization, and he just turned the other way to start addressing a more emotionally charged opposer when I tried to school him on the history of slavery in the Mediterranean lands of Islam after he muttered some unintelligible garble about the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary Wars. This kind of stuff makes me think it is quite reasonable to doubt if he knew much about that deadly historical phrase. No doubt that he had some awareness as to its hateful associations, I’m sure, but that is usually about as far as anyone with such felonious ideas will go in search of evidence to support what, for some reason or another, they *want* to be true. A few clicks here, some swipes there, and they think they are experts on a complex historical topic that takes years of study to unpack, investigate, and understand. “History does not even matter,” he said on multiple occasions as I tried to keep his attention on me instead of the others who were less interested in a dialogue for reasons that were becoming clearer to me by the moment. After a while, their anger rubbed off on me a bit too much, so I left him to his cultural prison cell, unable to recognize the walls that have been socially constructed around him.

So, history doesn’t matter? I am thinking about the lynching of Mr. Fred Rouse in Fort Worth on December 11, 1921 and the legacy that just one single event can leave behind. I am thinking about the perpetrators of that lynching and the historical memory they carried with them to their graves, never to be held accountable, likely passing on their hate with whatever else they were able to leave for their families. What did Mr. Rouse get to leave behind? Why was he deprived of the ability to live longer and accumulate experiences and capital and things for his family? He never got the chance to meet his own grandson, who is still alive today, in fact . . . but history doesn’t matter. I wonder if that man who stood so proudly against me at his “rally” ever got the chance to meet his grandfather. . . Or know him.

The proud man also believes that this country is composed of an “anti-white government” today with an “anti-white education system” and an “anti-white media” that wants to do away with him. . . “Do away with you?” I asked with such a bewildered tone in my voice. His justifications for these claims seemed to

boil down to the fact that *some* black people have killed *some* white people in the United States, that the country has done *some* things since the Civil War to ensure that black people are no longer subjected to enslavement, that there is a conspiracy within academia and the media to denigrate white people, and that the “diversity agenda” will eradicate whiteness. Shoot, the way he was talking made it seem like the United States has made it a crime to be white!

This guy seemed to have no idea about how the lives of many Black people have not been afforded the same treatment as the lives of many white people in this country, or how history has any connection to the present. He made no real attempt to understand how black bodies were commodified, brutalized, criminalized, subjugated, dismissed, gaslighted, and deprived of human dignity at the nation’s inception, or the impact that such history might have on successive generations. No genuine thought put in to how this treatment can, for some, seem like its baked into the cake of the nation’s existence, its systems, and institutions. “Racism does not even exist anymore, dude,” he kept saying; as if black people were all just magically accepted as citizens and have been welcomed as members of the nation with open arms since 1865. Just because you can no longer recognize an egg after it has been baked into a cake, does not mean the egg isn’t still there, blended in with the other ingredients.

I took my 17-year-old son with me so that he could see, firsthand, the actions of a group of people who operate on beliefs that they have not made any effort to question. Although one could hardly refer to these stragglers as a group, they did not disappoint my efforts in this regard. For my son, it has been quite clear for some time now how a historical refusal to include people in the same category based on skin color deprives the excluded group from equal treatment over time, so witnessing the certainty with which these few people were professing ideas he already knew to be false, was a valuable lesson on what good people like him are up against. Never underestimate the power of belief, or its ability to strengthen one’s resolve in the absurd. “We have the moral high ground,” the man also said a few times. He might have even used the words “righteous cause.”

What is so moral about thinking that your gain can only come from someone else’s loss, and the gain of someone else can only come at your expense? Andre 3000 told ya’ll back in 1996 that “no one is free while others are oppressed,” but like he said eight years later: “ya’ll don’t want to hear me, ya just want to dance.” Hell, these White Lives Matter folks don’t even want to do that, which is fine by me because, as another socially conscious musical act named Goodie Mob once said: “I done got a little too old, to get all, sweaty dancin’ round with ya’ll!”

### DARK AND DEADLY, CONTINUED . . .

*“If an individual fears existential consequences for their actions, then controlling them becomes easier”*

Other sources tell a different story, however; one that suggests these schools were made to “eradicate all vestiges of Indian culture.”

The first boarding school opened in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. Col. Richard Henry Pratt’s motto for this school was “Kill the Indian, save the man.” He was the founder and the headmaster at Carlisle for 25 years. He believed that stripping the children of their identities and fully immersing them into “mainstream” American life would help the assimilation process take effect. However, this was not how it played out. Almost all of the boarding schools followed Carlisle’s lead, yet most of them failed to teach the students much English equivalency beyond their own native tongue. History was taught with an obvious and blatant colonizer bias, and the bible was used in unison with the textbooks. This is backed up from the article itself, which stated that “the schoolbook and the Bible are doing more towards civilizing the redskin than the soldiers in Uncle Sam’s army.” Instructors taught the concept of sin and worked to instill a strong sense of guilt and fear into the children about their cultural heritage. If an individual fears existential consequences for their actions, then controlling them becomes all the easier.

To the everyday civilian of Saint Paul, reading this article likely left them feeling a number of ways. It is hard to tell from our vantage point in history today, but they likely felt comfort in believing they were safe and secure, while the Natives were not. Resentment and hostility towards Native peoples for taking so many government resources, while not even being grateful for them, was also likely prevalent. Additionally, the article talked very highly of the boarding schools, painting a dangerously incorrect image of what life was like there. None of this is true. It only exists in the minds of entitled colonizers, attempting to whitewash all of the land they were stealing. This article and many more like it served to support the false reality crafted by frontier colonization. These attitudes are reflected throughout the history of the United States, where even today we are still faced with heavy-handed attempts to white wash the nation’s most painful truths.

# Notes from the Underground

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**“HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE”**

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**“USE IT TO CONFRONT THE PAST”**

*Note: this publication 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,

Welcome back to another edition of *Notes from the Underground*, which has become known as the mouthpiece of The Historical Underground (THU). Some of you might be asking yourself: “What is this notes from under the ground?” Well, to take a quote from Akua Njeri—who was asked awhile back about how many members there are in the Black Panther Party: “those that know, don’t say, and those that say, don’t know.” If you’re involved, you just know. Its one of those things that can’t truly be named or labelled. We can tell you what it’s not, though. Its not a traditional academic journal, for example, for the character and style is less erudite and more rooted in grass, as they say. Despite rumors to the contrary, its not a “newsletter,” for it contains far more meaningful content besides a simple reporting on THU’s organizational activities or historical discussions (of which there are many); not a brochure either, for there is nothing to sell here except our ideas, which we give you for free; pamphlet does not quite capture the essence of *Notes*, either—for reasons we cannot quite explain. It’s obviously a publication, of course, but that is such a broad category that it does not convey much nuanced meaning. One thing we can tell you is that it is student driven. *Notes* does not exist without the students. Everything we do at The Underground is for the students. From the day it began back more than a decade now, THU was built and designed to educate, enlighten, energize, and empower TCC students with history. We offer a voice to students who have something to say and want to gain some experience with the publication process. Faculty and administrators contribute as well, either with advice or stories or articles over topics they feel students deserve to know or understand. No *Notes* edition has ever been crafted without an intellectual spark that began with a student! When one wants to be heard, we invest the time to make it happen. Sometimes its just one student with a topic or theme or idea to explore, while other times its more. In this edition, the feature article is brought to you by a present student, Baylee Higginbotham, whose exploration of the consequences or impact of a U.S. government policy towards Native Americans is important and interesting to read. Another piece stems from an interview that one of the Founding Undergrounders did with a former student who has made his way to TCU as a transfer student. His name is Somiari Tobin, and he helped build recognition for The Underground as a member and an officer before leaving for bigger and better things. Capturing his thoughts and perspectives in the present day was rewarding for those of us who were here with him before he left. The other contribution represents the second half of an article that appeared in the previous edition and focuses on a specific personal experience another Founder of the Underground had at a Fort Worth rally last year. We hope these articles pique your interest and motivate you to join the movement and draft a piece of writing for our community of readers to consume with their eyes and their minds in a future edition. So reach out, speak up, be heard, represent your students, or draft your thoughts into an article over a topic of your choice, ranging anywhere from 500 –1600 words. We want to elevate your voice and provide the community of TCC with access to more reading material, which seems to be harder and harder to come for students these days who spend so much of their time in the digital realm. For us, reading is a powerful tool that can unlock interests students never knew they had; it is also empowering for them to see their name in print. You can help make this happen by dedicating some time to drafting an article or spreading the word to your student that they, too, can have their voices lifted.

~ Editors from the Underground