

Notes from the Underground

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THE HISTORICAL UNDERGROUND

Reflections from the Underground: Our Black History Month Lecture Series

By: Somiari Tobin, Student

Around about October of last year, I was faced with a clear decision that needed to be made. As the sitting president of TCC Southeast's sole student history organization, I found myself considering the all-too-real problem of wondering about how outsiders to the Underground perceived the nature of our organization. Not to make light of a situation that caused me and some of my close associates much stress and turmoil, but I was beginning to wonder whether or not this amazing club was in the Dangerfield-ian position of getting "No respect... No respect at all." As a group, we were faced with several issues concerning organizational functionality and development (not being delivered food orders, our room not being unlocked for the first 45 minutes of one of our weekly club meetings during our allotted time, people discouraging prospective members from attending and speaking their minds, etc.), so I felt an obligation bearing down on me to figure out how to reverse this trajectory looming over the club I have valued so much over the course of my career at TCC. After speaking to my officers, to various club members, and a number of uninvolved parties as well, it seemed that the Historical Underground was essentially becoming known around campus as a group of weirdos like the cast of Rocky Horror Picture Show or something, with a militant black supremacist for a leader who somehow drew large numbers at meetings and fundraisers just by dumb luck.

Although I was flattered that someone considered me "black enough" to be a "supremacist," I subsequently found out that this characterization had less to do with me and more to do with a combination of us still being in the shadow of the group's past iterations and my desire to focus on issues related to people who have not traditionally held vast economic or cultural power. This led to what I called the three-minutes-to-midnight meeting where I called in two other officers and talked out my plan to reshape the image of our organization. My plans revolved around hosting more events,

launching a fresh new website, and making our infrastructure and branding so strong and visible that there could be no mistaking who we were and what we stood for as club. This is where the black history month lecture series comes in.

Last year, we had regular meetings that often asked those in attendance to reflect on the place of black people in U.S. American society, or to ponder the nature of black existence in the Atlantic world and analyze media depictions of blackness. For me, this was all well and good, but it just wasn't enough. As such, I started conceptualizing a larger discussion for a larger audience. I put my team together, and we started begging folks to speak on issues pertaining to the black experience in the United States. By the time we had our last meeting of 2018 in early December, I had assembled a cadre of support from loyal members and officers to plan, and plan, and plan some more about how we were going to organize this massive lecture series. I appointed a whole cabinet, and even put things in motion to order new Polo shirts with our newly renovated logo stitched into the front. Now, armed with a fresh new look, we began the important leg work for securing dates, speakers, and rooms for the 2019 lecture series.

From there, it seems to me that the series just started coming together. We secured four events with three different speakers and a 4 person panel discussion that we used to kick-off the series in the North Ballroom. In fact, I remember being so enamored with all the paperwork and planning for this series that I completely forgot about my role in the first event of the series! It must be said here – full disclosure – that saying you want to plan, host, and organize a fully catered lecture series (and a panel discussion to go with it) is one thing, but actually preparing for a fully catered lecture series and panel discussion is a whole different beast. Just the paperwork, deadlines, and constant barrage of interviews I went through on a weekly basis leading up to the event seemed like a herculean task for me. To say the least, my rock star fantasy of putting on a great show was quickly dragged back to reality. Indeed, this event that I started with so much passion for organizing from the ground up turned into a monster of paperwork, red tape, and scheduling conflict-resolution; yet we endured, the dream was not killed, and we persevered.

In the midst of all that planning, I was able to secure our panelists, solve the food crisis, and even resolve the issue of only having half the ballroom to work with. However, I forgot the most important part: my PowerPoint. So, with less than 24 hours before the lecture series kicked-off with our panel, which I was responsible for introducing and providing the opening lecture for regarding the contributions of black Americans to Rock n Roll culture, I found myself scrounging around to make a PowerPoint from scratch. I didn't want to just be up there spouting music related psychobabble, so this was an important part of the plans that I had completely spaced out on! Thankfully, with some much needed help from my loyal supporters, the

day went smoothly and the lecture was a success. Most of what I remember of the day is that it was very hectic—especially after realizing that our sound check support was going to be late due to a scheduling conflict. Once again, though, the staff came through, and the event ran flawlessly. In fact, attendance far succeeded any of our expectations, and people left with more knowledge than they had bargained for.

For this, I want to extend a major thanks to Brandon "Le Lune" Biggs, Ladi, Jordan (our historian), and Dr. Borougerdi (who was literally asked to be on the panel while he was in the audience during my lecture because one of the panelists backed out at the last minute, and he said yes). The event received rave reviews, but it would not have been the same without their help and support. This kickoff, however, was only the beginning of our lecture series, which continued the following Tuesday with a lecture by the chair of the History department, Mr. Downs. His lecture on convict leasing gave the audience a great deal of knowledge to chew on regarding the troubles of being black in the United States after slavery was "abolished" in this country following the Civil War. Dr. Borougerdi followed up the next week with a lecture that I had the pleasure of attending in its entirety called "Fred Hampton on Your Campus: Portrait of a Revolutionary." This event in many ways encompassed my goal for the series because it was a deeply thought provoking discussion with an awesome turnout. Honestly, afterwards I had a moment of realization that, regardless of outside perceptions about our club or what we stand for, these are the moments that really matter and make a difference in people's lives. The final installment of our program concluded with a presentation from another THU faculty sponsor. Mr. Salas, who also helped me formulate the ideas I developed for my lecture on Rock n Roll and the Black Experience before our panel. He gave a riveting reenactment of sorts regarding Malcolm X's ideology as a Black Nationalist. Attendance was also booming for this event, and I think I speak for all those who showed up when I say that none of these events wasted any time, and they all provided powerful insights and knowledge on one level or another.

So, I guess I will end this reflection with a message to those detractors out there: the validation that this series have given us feels sweet!

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MAKING CHANGE

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Ruminations on Revolutions: A Historical Interview with Bradley J. Borougerdi

By: Adaora Okoye, Student

AO: *What makes an effective and successful revolution?*

BJB: This is a very subjective question that would elicit various responses if asked to multiple historians, but for me I would say a successful rebellion and an effective rebellion could be two different things. A rebellion, for example, could be effective in helping to galvanize the upper class against a multiracial lower class like it was during Bacon's Rebellion (1676), but Bacon's Rebellion was clearly unsuccessful because it ended when he died and resulted in more oppressive laws against many of his followers. In other words, Bacon's Rebellion was very effective in helping the English draw an impermeable racial line between black and white people, but Bacon and his followers did not succeed in their movement.

AO: *Are rebellions and revolutions always necessary?*

BJB: Necessary for what? Nothing is necessary in history. There are perhaps—though some would argue against this as well—necessary effects that develop out of particular causes, or vice-versa perhaps, but for me nothing is necessary in history. History is the sum accumulation of human experiences, combined with the collective memory that cultures develop over time to drive or motivate their actions. Historical interactions over time and space, regardless whether they spark revolutions or not, have consequences, but I have a hard time thinking that these consequences are necessary. If, however, you mean to ask whether or not a rebellion or a revolution is necessary to stimulate change in a society, then perhaps I would say yes, to a point, but I don't subscribe to any idea that embraces the notion of inevitability in history. I do think rebellions and revolutions are about change, though, or a pursuit towards change, and that many revolutions develop out of harsh situations that reach a boiling point of sorts. In this regard, I would agree with Crane Britton in his work, *Anatomy of Revolution*, in which he discussed differences between "preconditions" and "triggers" in revolutions. In other words, the things that lead up to the big change, verses the things that trigger the immediate actions that get the ball rolling.

AO: *Do people always end up benefiting from political rebellions/revolutions?*

BJB: No they certainly do not. Perhaps some people always end up benefiting, but others always ends up losing something. By political revolution, I mean the overthrow of a government through violent recourse against some real or perceived repressive state apparatus. Rarely does this ever happen without violence. People like to point towards the so-called American Revolution as a less violent one, but a closer look shows otherwise. Not only that, but the transition from British Colonies to The United States of America was not revolutionary in the same sense that the French Revolution was revolutionary. The French Revolution was the first real modern revolution many say, because it toppled the old order and replaced it with a radically new one. In the United States, the same people who were in charge of the British Colonies before the "revolution" (i.e., the colonial elites) were the same people who were in charge after. They just called themselves something different. Black people were certainly still badly oppressed, and non-landowners could not participate in the government (nor could women). In France, however, those who were previously oppressed overthrew the oppressor, executed the monarchs, and instated an New Order. This changed revolutions and the meaning of revolution in fact. For people like Edmond Burke who wrote about the American Revolution when it was going on, he used the word to mean something like "revolve" back to the good old days, when the idea of "Rights as Englishmen" gave colonists more money in their pockets. After the French Revolution, though, the word revolution came to mean a transformation into something new. This is the context in which Karl Marx discussed the term revolution, and it had a tremendously influence on the word over the 19th and 20th centuries.

As for a rebellion, I would say it is different from a revolution in that a rebellion is more like an action, whereas a revolution is more like a process. Rebellions can often lead to revolutions, or put another way often serve as the "triggers" of revolutions—very much like the peasants storming the Bastille triggered the French Revolution—but they can often times lead to stronger reactionary forces overpowering them and developing new ways to maintain the structures of oppression, such as the example of Bacon's Rebellion I mentioned earlier, in which Bacon's failure led to stronger divisions between black and white, or a stronger emphasis on radicalized slavery.

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CONVERSATIONS FROM THE UNDERGROUND

A Historical Underground Interview with Josué Muñoz, Dean of Humanities

For this edition, we at the Underground had the opportunity to catch up with TCC's Dean of Humanities to pick his brain for a bit about his job and views on history.

THU: **You have been the Dean of Humanities for a while now. Can you explain to our readers what this title means to you and how you feel it allows you to contribute to TCC's mission on the Southeast campus?**

The role of dean is similar to a manager. I oversee employees, classes, students, budget, and do all types of problem solving. The most important part of my duties are the things that I can do in this position that benefit students, staff and faculty. I think that, by doing the best I can in my position and my willingness to serve others contributes to the college's mission and final success for all.

THU: **Has this always been your title at TCC? If not, what did you do for the college beforehand, and how has your role changed from then to now?**

"I was first hired as an adjunct instructor of Spanish at South campus in 1992 and then as a fulltime instructor in 1994. In 1996, when the Southeast campus opened, I was asked if I wanted to transfer to the new campus. Of course, I

accepted the invitation because I thought it would be an exciting opportunity to open a new campus and start the foreign language program. I have since

served as a faculty member, department chair, and dean at the Southeast campus.

THU: **What is the Humanities, and why do you feel they are important fields of study for students in the world today?**

The humanities are areas of study that focus on the documentation of how the human experience is processed. Some of these areas include philosophy, sociology, history, and language, to name a few. All of these areas are important because they allow students to learn how humans think and function every day and have done so for thousands of years. This knowledge can easily be applied to all fields of study from business to politics to medicine.

THU: **Have you always been interested in the Humanities? What is the earliest memories you have regarding when you got hooked on Humanities?**

When I was very young I was fascinated by how things were built so naturally

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Conversations From the Underground, cont.

I always thought I would be an engineer or architect. Once I got older and went to college, I studied architecture and found the historical part of it more interesting. At about that same time I began to realize that my bilingual language abilities could also be something that I could focus on, so I started taking a few language courses and pretty soon I was more interested in Latin American literature, history, and art. At that point I decided to switch majors and focused the rest of my college career studying languages.

THU: How have the Humanities shaped or transformed your life?

The humanities have definitely been very important since they have allowed me to have a greater worldview on things. All of these disciplines are linked and allow you to see that, regardless of the continent, all humans have basically done the exact same things in regard to developing a language, culture, and history.

THU: Do you have any advice for students who are interested in perusing a career in the Humanities?

My recommendation is to find something that you are passionate about and focus on that and learn as much as possible about it. Share that knowledge with others and continue to research all aspects of that discipline. There are many career opportunities that can develop from your area of expertise.

THU: In your words, what is history and why is history important to study as a college student in the 21st century?

History is everything that has occurred in this world since the beginning of time and it is also everything that we learn from those past experiences that will create our future. I think it's important to today's college student because they can study historical events and learn from both the good and bad of what has already occurred.

THU: If you could go back in time to one particular era or period in history, which one would it be and why?

There are a lot of time periods that I find interesting but I think I would want to visit a time and place where one of my forefathers lived and see how and what they did to survive and lay part of the foundation that is now part of my personal history.

THU: If you could have a conversation with one historical figure from the past, who would it be and why, and what would you be eager to asked that person?

I would like to visit with both Moctezuma II and Cortés when they first encountered each other in Tenochtitlán (Mexico City today) and find out what was going on in their heads during their first meeting.



Josué Muñoz, Dean of Humanities, has been the backbone of support for the Historical Underground since its inception back in 2010. His dedication to fostering a culture of learning on campus has been a powerful force of our success. The Underground is forever grateful for his presence on campus.

Ruminations on Revolutions, cont.

AO: What do you think the most successful rebellion was or at least what do you think can be taken away from that said rebellion/revolution?

BJB: These types of questions are very hard for me to answer, but if I had to say perhaps Sparta was the most successful rebellion, Haiti was the most shockingly successful revolution, and the Bolshevik Revolution is the one that gives us the most evidence of what we can take away from revolutions because it was the longest lasting revolution of its kind that collapsed 70 years after it emerged. All of these examples teach us valuable lessons about the limits that human beings have towards experiencing oppression—especially when they are in environments surrounded by other groups of people with certain privileges that seem clearly unjust.

AO: Where do morals lie in revolutions/rebellions?

BJB: As a cultural historian, I tend to view morality as a socially constructed cultural entity that follows the human experience. As such, the moral code that cultures develop over time guides the historical actions of societies. Sometimes powerful events or significant processes break out that dramatically tilt the concept of morality in one direction or another, but the complexities of right and wrong tend to be culturally ambiguous. Humanity has developed some common threads of morality over millennia of interacting with the environment, but their really are drastically different ways of being, or ways or orienting oneself to the world.

AO: In cases like these, can the oppressed become the oppressor?

BJB: In any case in which an oppressed group overthrows an oppressive group, this can be the case. Friedrich Nietzsche famously said something to the effect that "those who fight against monsters must take

care that they themselves do not become monsters." Others have famously said things like "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." I am not sure that I agree with the last one, but there is something to the idea. Perhaps it has something to do with the nature of violence that tends to follow the removal of one's oppressor that desensitizes people to violence, but I really don't know.

AO: From what circumstances can a political rebellion come about?

BJB: All types of circumstances. Famine, slavery, repressions, economic recession, perceived loss of something that a people hold valuable, fear, imperial over-extension, resource exploitation, mass catastrophe, or political ineptitude. Or others perhaps, I don't think this is an exhaustive list, but it usually results as a combination of many of these boiling over after certain triggers get a movement in motion.



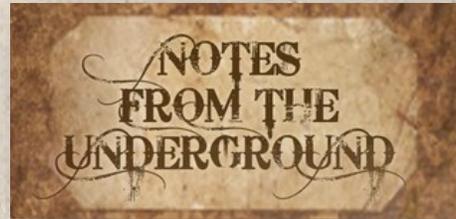
Notes from the Underground

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“HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE”

Join Us: Thursdays /2pm/ESEE 1109

Contact: bradley.borougerdi@tccd.edu/
eric.salas@tccd.edu/
gregory.kosc@tccd.edu



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“WE USE IT TO CONFRONT THE PAST”

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

The Historical Underground is back again with another edition of *Notes from the Underground*. This is the first semester that we have produced more than one edition since back in 2015, so we are on a roll this year. This is also the first time that we are featuring an article written by the sitting president of the organization. Hopefully it will not be the last, and the legacy of Somiari's leadership carries on after his tenure is up in that position. Those of you who attend our weekly meetings know how passionate they are, but this is due to the strong leadership of our officer core. Somiari's article on his experience organizing, attending, and presenting at a multi-event lecture series provides a perspective into the type of dedication it takes to be one of the best, but we encourage you to also think about the hard work he and the other officers conduct on a weekly basis to get these meetings running smoothly, week after week. Take heed of their actions, and try to follow in their footsteps because we are going to need others to step up and fill the super-sized shoes of this outgoing cohort of officers that we owe so much of our success to as an organization.

Speaking of success, we must say that we wholeheartedly agree with the reflections of our organization's president when he discusses the exhilarating experience that comes with putting on a successful event. We will not regurgitate any of the points he made about it in his article, but suffice it to say that he will have a much stronger resume now to show those scholarship committees and job interviewers when the time comes! As for the next article in this edition, the idea for it came about when a student member of the Underground approached sponsor Bradley J. Borougerdi for help with an English assignment at one of our meetings. Her questions made it difficult for him to shut up about the subject, so we turned the exchange into a Q&A type article in hopes that it will stimulate dialog amongst our readers about an interesting topic. We hope it provides you with some general thoughts to consider when trying to judge the significance of revolutions in history. The final article in this edition stems from an interview that THU conducted with the Dean of Humanities, Josué Muñoz, which provides valuable insight for those seeking a career in the humanities. This is a point we at the Underground stress every chance we get because we see the humanities as an essential division of knowledge for understanding the human experience across the world. Everything has a history, and understanding it will drastically improve your ability to navigate through whatever subject, idea, or event you are trying to make sense of in your life. Treat your humanities courses like they are the most important courses in your life right now, and they will help you shape and articulate your ideas and thoughts about the world and your own place within it.

Finally, if you have paid attention to anything around campus this semester, then you most certainly have encountered the barrage of signage across campus pertaining to all the colorful presentations by all of our wonderful faculty on campus this semester. There were multiple events connected to Women's History Month, some of which were presented by our new faculty members in the history department. One of them in particular, Stephanie Hawkins, not only presented a lecture on the history of beauty pageants, but she is working with Underground sponsors J. Joel Tovanche and Bradley J. Borougerdi on the Southeast Century Series, which consisted of three lectures this spring. If you were fortunate enough to attend any of these lectures, then surely you have recognized our department's commitment to excellence and to presenting knowledge to the public. We hope you continue supporting our organization and the humanities department as we work tirelessly to make these events accessible to the TCC community, and that The Historical Underground crosses your mind every now and again on Thursdays around 2pm.

~ Editors from the Underground