

# Notes from the Underground

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## The Historical Underground

### *What is History?*

The answer to this question may seem simple enough, but it is in fact complex. When I start the semester off with this question, most students respond with something to the effect of history being a record of the past, or events that took place in some far off era that is deeply removed from the present.

But in fact history is much more than this. The key word that is usually missing from the familiar responses students give is *interpretation*. After all, history is an interpretation of the past, which means that stories are told from a point of view, and narratives are created by someone choosing what to include. This is an inescapable part of investigating the past, for nobody can possibly know of or understand all that goes on in time and space. As a result, historians are forced to choose what they think is important in order to create what society will consider to be a meaningful past.

These realities make studying history a complicated endeavor, for we must always be conscious of the fact that events, processes, and experiences get left out. Whether this is done on purpose, subconsciously, or out of pure ignorance, history is always escaping us, disappearing into hidden corners of the past, which has a profound effect on the story that gets told.

What this means is that history is constructed, created, and to some extent imagined. However, this does not mean that it is pure fiction, because historical scholarship is based on things that happen in the real world. The problem is that we all have different perspectives of that world, which influences the stories that get written down and remembered. As a result, the historian must constantly be aware of his or her own bias and the biases of the authors he or she reads. In other words, the historian must constantly question. In fact, most of what historians strive to do is ask the right ques-

tions.

Asking the proper questions and coming to grips with the fact that history is constructed is crucial, for it helps us understand that the past only really exist in the present. In other words, we are the ones that give the past meaning. This is important, because people use history all the time to justify the present and their political agendas. Instead, we should try to contextualize the past as best we can, and try to explain the present with the past—not the other way around.

~ Bradley J Borougerdi, Faculty



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#### *C o n v e r s a t i o n s   w i t h   H i s t o r y : J a c k s o n   K e l l y*

##### **How did you become interested in history?**

I first became interested in history when I took Mr. Borougerdi's class. It was my first non-high school history class, and it immediately grabbed my interest. Throughout high school my teachers only taught what would be on the state test, so every year I'd learn the same stuff, but we never really focused on what happened during those times. But walking into a college class and hearing a different side of the story from someone who actually enjoys history showed me that there was a lot I was missing out on, and it

wasn't as boring as I always thought it was.

##### **What do you think history has to offer students at the Community College?**

History allows growth. By learning what happened in the past, we gain a foundation for our future. Even if we don't plan on being politicians or historians, it is important to learn where we came from so we can figure out where we go from here.

**As a founding member of The Historical Underground, what would you like the legacy of the**

##### **organization to be for future students?**

I want the legacy for future students to be growth. Since the beginning THU has been about setting a goal that will improve the organization, and then meeting that goal. I've always enjoyed seeing THU grow as an organization, and I'm looking forward to seeing future accomplishments.

##### **How do you think taking history classes at TCCD has benefited your academic career?**

It has definitely helped me with my

## Why Study History?

First of all, let's be clear, college-level history isn't like high school history. In college-level history classes we directly confront our past: the good, the bad, and the ugly of it all. We do this so that you can better understand our past and human nature.

Perhaps most importantly, if you have a solid foundation of history, you will begin to more fully understand the world around you. You will be better prepared to understand nations' and peoples' motivations and interests. As you begin to learn more about the world and human nature, you will also begin to naturally form your own opinions on these matters. In short, you will come to formulate your own worldview – independent of your parents, family, and professor. So, when you pick up *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* at Starbucks, you will be able to comprehend it and discuss the issues at stake. What all

*“There is no one truth, but there are an awful lot of objective facts, and the more facts you manage to obtain, the closer you will come to whatever truth there is.”*

~ Robert Caro, historian

this also means is that, since you have a good understanding of what is moving/ shaping the world, you will also have a pretty good idea of how national and global events might develop. I'm not saying that you will become Nostradamus, but you will have a sense of the larger trends shaping our future. In sum, you will be working toward becoming a well-informed global citizen.

Beyond understanding the world and formulating your worldview, studying history has *very* practical benefits. By constantly analyzing events, perspectives, culture, etc. in history classes, you will become a more systematic thinker. Furthermore, you may hate writing essays, but synthesizing all of that information and interpreting it will make you a better thinker and writer. No matter what field you eventually end up pursuing for a career, these skills will help you master your chosen profession.

~ Greg Kosc, Faculty

## How Do Historians Write History?



*President, reformer, and professional tough guy, Teddy Roosevelt also happened to be an historian. TR wrote books on the naval aspects of the War of 1812 and a three-volume history of the American West.*

Professional historians not only read a lot, but they write a lot too. So, how do historians write books? Well, historians use different kinds of evidence when piecing together a story.

The first kinds of evidence that historians use when writing a book or article are called **PRIMARY DOCUMENTS**. Primary documents are materials that were produced during the time period under investigation. Primary documents do not necessarily have to be crusty old letters or diaries. Say, for instance, that you were writing a paper on 1980s American cinema. In that case, if you were to analyze the film *Rocky IV* (1985) in your paper, the film itself would be considered a primary document since it was produced during the time period you are investigating.

The second kinds of evidence historians use are called **SECONDARY SOURCES**. Secondary sources are materials that were

produced after the period that is under investigation (or written by persons without direct experience of a situation) and seek to discuss events and information. Usually, secondary sources are articles or books written by other historians that attempt to analyze events. So, for example, my colleague John Lundberg just wrote a book about Texas soldiers who fought for the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War. The letters and correspondence that he investigated to write the book are considered primary sources, but the book that he wrote is – in fact – a secondary source to readers because it is once removed from the original documents that he used to construct the book.

Historians advocate that when writing anything, one should try to rely on primary sources, but if there are none accessible, then one should employ secondary sources.

~ Greg Kosc, Faculty

## *Conversations with History, Continued....*

note-taking skills. But, as far as academically, it's taught me how to not take things at face value. Learning about history, you don't need to memorize every little detail; instead, you really need to understand the concepts of that time period/event. That has helped with other classes substantially. Now, instead of stressing over everything the teacher said while I study for a test, I make sure I know and understand the concept so I'm confident that I'll pass, and that I've learned something valuable.

### **Do you plan to take any more history courses and if so, what types?**

I might take a couple further down the road. If I do take more history classes they would be focused more on music, philosophy, or even a world history class.

### **If you could have one conversation with someone in the past, who would it be and why?**

I would choose Homer. I've always enjoyed good stories. From reading them, watching them, and even trying to write them, a good story always appeals to me. Homer was the world's first storyteller in my eyes; to sit down and talk to him about those stories would be great. Even if I could only hear one of his epics be told through his own words would be awesome enough.

*Jackson Kelly has just finished his tenure at TCCD and is transferring to the University of Texas at Arlington this fall. He just changed his major from Music Education to Computer Programming, but he hopes to find a career that will allow him to use*

*both. He was an excellent student at TCCD and will be missed by the organization for all he contributed. Good luck with your future studies Jackson, and thanks for everything!*



## *History Classes at TCC Southeast*

At TCC—Southeast we offer a larger variety of history classes than any other TCC campus. We have many different "Special Emphasis" classes for the U.S. history survey classes. For instance, for the first half of American history (HIST 1301), we offer an **African American** emphasis course and this coming semester, for the first time, we will offer an emphasis on **Native American history**. And, our department also features a variety of these classes for HIST 1302. For example, we offer **Women's history**, **Veteran's history**, **African American history**, and for political junkies we even have a class that focuses on **Great Elections in American history**.

Two of our faculty members also just won a grant to design a U.S. history survey class with a cultural emphasis. So, if you are interested in that, the class will be implemented at the beginning of next academic year.

If you are more interested in Texas history, we would recommend the very

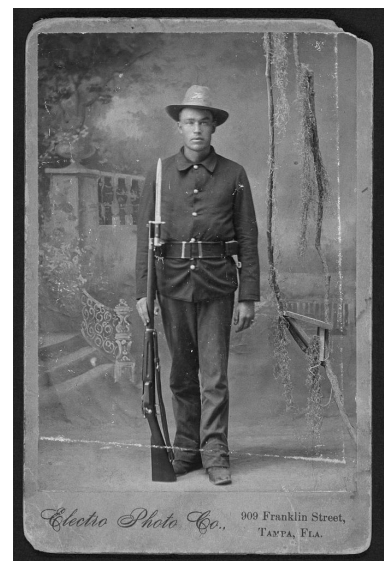
popular **History of Texas** class (HIST 2301), which can be substituted for one of your U.S. history credits.

Our faculty also strive to instill a global perspective in our students, and to that end we offer sections of **Western Civilization** (HIST 2311-12) and **World Civilizations** (HIST 2321-22). All of these are 2000-level classes, but they are still broad surveys, much like the U.S. history surveys. We greatly encourage students to take—at the very least—one of these 2000-level classes.

In the history department, we are also considering adding more 2000-level classes in **African-American** and **Mexican-American history**. We envision these classes allowing students to build on the knowledge they gained in U.S. history survey classes in order to develop a real specialization of their own.

We would *love* to hear your feedback on these potential classes. Are there other classes that you would be interested in

taking? Find us on Facebook and voice your opinion!



***Want to know what this African-American soldier experienced in Tampa, Florida on his way to fight in Cuba? Take a U.S. history with an emphasis on African American history.***



# Notes from the Underground

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Special Orientation Edition

"HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE"



Join Us:

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## Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are proud to present to you our special edition of *Notes from the Underground*. This issue has a very specific goal: we want to introduce the discipline of history to students. The state of Texas requires that you take a minimum of 6 hours of history in order to attain any postsecondary degree. We hope that this issue goes a little way in explaining why your state (and many others around this country) demand that you take American history as a college student. Obviously, as historians, we are a little biased and believe that history is the single most important subject you will ever take as a human being. We believe history will prepare you to participate actively in our democracy and society, as well as the world at large. Hopefully, it will also allow you to make sense of the larger forces that shape and—in some ways—dictate your life. And, obviously, we agree with the influential historian, Robert Caro, that "[t]he power of history is in the end the greatest power." But, even if you don't come to the same conclusions, we do hope—at the very least—that you come to see the indispensable nature of history to our society as a whole. There are so many lessons to be learned from our past about politics, society, culture, and economics.

We also want to put a plug in for The Historical Underground, our Southeast student organization dedicated to examining and experiencing the past. During the Fall and Spring semesters the group meets on a weekly basis. We discuss historical and current events at our meetings, publish this newsletter once a month, have socials, and get out once or twice a semester for field trips. Last year, the group went to see the film *J. Edgar* and the JFK Museum. We are in the process of putting together a short film about members' experiences at the JFK Museum. You can view it in the Commons area when TCC has its annual Club Expo Day in the Fall semester. If you are interested in joining us, you can find us on CampusCruiser, Blackboard, and Facebook.

~ Bradley J Borougerdi, Eric Salas, & Greg Kosc

