

OLD (OLDE NUS) NEWS

The Reed History Department Newsletter

Summer 2020

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CHAIR'S NOTE

The spring and summer of 2020 has given historians a lot to think about. As a group, we are accustomed to dwelling in the foreign countries of the past, taking on the incremental work of making sense and meaning out of the unfamiliar structures, movements, and patterns of change we construct from the archives. It is often slow, hard work, at once engaged with the present and resistant to an unremitting and impatient attention to that present. And yet in the spring of 2020, the immediacy of the present has exploded into our lives, first in the form of a historic global pandemic, and then in a renewed and revitalized effort to redress racial injustice in this country that demands both our personal and professional attention as that pandemic continues. COVID-19 and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement have brought both the limits and the value of our scholarship and teaching into sharp relief these past few months. We historians continue to study historical change; now we are living through it in a new way, and the stakes of our scholarship sit at the center of public discourse. For better or for worse, what a time to be a historian!

Thank You Mary Ashburn Miller!

The department extends its utmost gratitude to Mary Miller for her outstanding work as department chair over the past three years. In her time as chair, Mary helped update and manage the changing day-to-day operations of the department and shepherded our students and our faculty through challenging and tumultuous times, most recently including the crises of the global pandemic. Mary leaves the department more organized, collegial, and secure than she found it. This summer, Mary handed the reins over to Josh Howe (who returns from sabbatical with some big shoes to fill!). In July, department faculty feted Mary's tenure as chair with a gift of French wines—a token of appreciation, and a nod toward better days to come. Thanks Mary!

Over the past few months, your History Department faculty have met frequently to discuss how we as a community of scholars can help rise to the challenges of the present moment. We certainly don't have all the answers. And yet, the department has expressed common purpose in a few fundamental areas, and that common purpose guides us forward as we prepare for the fall semester.

First and foremost, we historians stand to be counted in solidarity with anti-racist movements both here and throughout the world demanding an end to police violence and systematic racism. Black Lives Matter. Each of us specializes in a different field of history, and in each of these fields the opportunities to interrogate structures of oppression and amplify marginalized voices looks different. Even so, each of us takes our responsibility to contribute to an anti-racist

teaching agenda seriously, and for many of us, this summer's protests have added even more urgency to that agenda.

We have also recognized our responsibility as a department on this front. In June, the History Department faculty signed on to [a statement on Anti-Racism and Reconciliation at Reed produced by the Comparative Race and Ethnicity Studies program](#), of which History is a constituent department. CRES is a program that emerged from the demands of a Black-led multi-racial coalition of faculty and students for a dedicated course of study that critically engages with issues of race and ethnicity. It is the legacy of a long history of protests and activism at Reed dedicated to repairing the effects of institutional racism at the college. The History Department has traditionally eschewed departmental positions in favor of individual faculty autonomy; in this case, however, the department voted unanimously to support the CRES statement and its recommendations for meaningfully addressing racism through our courses, our research, and our participation in the structures of the college.

For a glimpse into how we as a community—faculty, students, and recent history alums—are engaging historical scholarship in the current moment, check out the “what we are reading” section of this newsletter, fronted by Radhika Natarajan’s thoughtful reflections on redesigning her “Aftermath of WWI” course for the fall of 2020.

The second challenge the department faces this fall overlaps with the first. That is the practical problem of how to safely, effectively, and equitably deliver a Reed History education against

the backdrop of a global pandemic. Again, even under these challenging conditions, we are guided by a common purpose: to provide our students with the best undergraduate history education we possibly can. The department has been deeply involved in workshops on online and socially distanced learning at the Center for Teaching and Learning over the summer, and we are all reimagining our courses so that they can best accommodate a dynamic new context. Working with the administration and other faculty from around the college—and building upon the surveys and evaluations students filled out this spring—we have created an exciting mix of flexible in-person and online offerings designed to make the most out of the new parameters imposed by the COVID-19 crisis.

As a community of scholars, we are planning for a fall amidst many uncertainties. The only true certainty may be that in person or otherwise, the return to Reed in August will not be a return to “normal.” And yet, it will still be a return to Reed—to rigorous and creative scholarship, to critical engagement with sources, to the fulfillment of carefully crafted writing, to the sense of wonder that comes with teaching and doing history at the college. The study of history matters as much now as it ever has, and we are excited to see you back in class to explore it this fall in whatever forms that exploration takes.

All the best from your humble new chair,



Josh Howe

STUDENT EDITORS WANTED!

Hey, want to help edit the next History Newsletter? YOU DO?! Great! The Department is looking for volunteers to help manage the department’s fall edition. For more information, send a quick email to

Josh Howe at jhowe@reed.edu.

History Course and Schedule Changes for Fall 2020

As you know, the ongoing COVID pandemic has forced the college and the department to adjust some of its course offerings and its course schedule. Most of our History offerings will remain online for the fall with only minor scheduling tweaks. There are a few important changes, however:

1. The fall semester Junior Seminar has been cancelled. Juniors, don't forget to sign up for HIST 411: China's Foreign Relations with Doug Fix in the spring!
2. Josh Howe has added an online-only section of HIST270: Introduction to American Environmental History, which will otherwise be taught in person, on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.
3. Margot Minardi has split her HIST369: Race and Law in American History, into two sections, one at 9am and one at 11:10, both MWF.
4. Michael Breen will only teach one section of HIST353: The French Revolution this fall. This course will be in person.
5. Both Michael and Margot plan to offer additional courses during the spring semester. Stay tuned!

If you have questions or concerns about History course offerings and changes, check in with your adviser or send a note to Josh Howe (chair), and they will do their best to help find answers. As always

WHAT WE ARE READING

As faculty, one of the great luxuries of summer time is that we finally have time to read. For many of us, that primarily means reading history—new works in our fields, books we may want to teach in the fall, old articles that we have been meaning to look at for ages. But it also often means reading widely in other fields, broadening our thinking about the world. Sometimes we even read fiction (gasp!). So, amidst a global pandemic and a civil rights protests, with an election coming in the fall...what are we reading? And as students, what are *you* reading?

In this section, Radhika Natarajan kicks off the discussion by providing some reflections on new readings and subject matter in the context of her course on "The Aftermath of WWI in the British Empire." Radhika's piece is followed by brief notes from faculty, students, and history alumni about what they are reading, and what it means to be reading at this moment in time.

READING AND REFLECTIONS

by Radhika Natarajan

We are currently living in the midst of a pandemic, an uprising against racial injustice, and a political crisis all at once. While the word "unprecedented" has been used repeatedly to describe this moment, as historians, we know the past offers untold examples to think through contemporary dynamics.

Thesis Forms

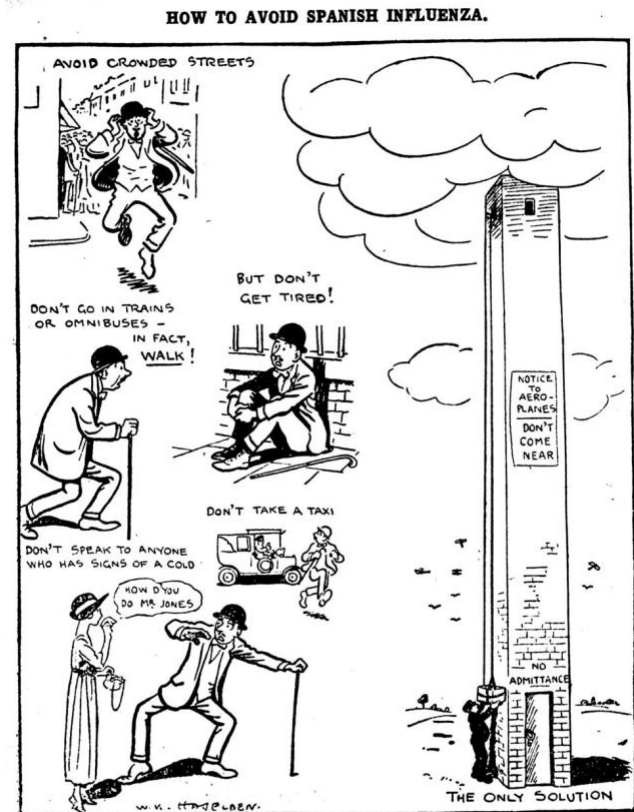
Thesis preference forms went out to seniors this month (EXCITING!), and many of our seniors participated in a lovely thesis zoom conference with Mary, Jackie, and Josh. It was great to see so many familiar faces, and heartening to hear the excitement (and, let's be honest, a little anxiety) for the upcoming thesis year. It will be like no other thesis year before it! Seniors, please remember to turn those thesis forms in to Julie Shannon no later than **August 1st**.

This Fall, I am scheduled to teach “The Aftermath of World War I in the British Empire.” Unlike my other courses, which cover longer periods of time, this class focuses solely on two decades. This narrowed periodization allows us to examine experiences of colonial soldiers in the Great War, the beginnings of anticolonial nationalist movements, and the forms of internationalism that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded this spring, I realized that the last iteration of my syllabus had a major blind spot—there was no discussion of the [1918–9 global influenza pandemic](#). Scholars estimate that between 50 and 100 million people died during that pandemic, more than were killed in World War I. As we endure COVID-19, it feels impossible that our current pandemic will not have individual, societal, and global repercussions that will be felt for decades. So how was it possible that I did not include the 1918–9 influenza epidemic and its consequences on my syllabus?

I can’t fully answer that question except to say that given a limited number of class meetings, I deemed other events to be more essential to the politics of the interwar period. Our current pandemic reminds me that our views of the past are always shaped by the present.

This summer, I’m learning about the earlier pandemic in order to revise my syllabus for the Fall. I want to talk with students about the impact of influenza on the British Caribbean, British West Africa, and India and the broader politics of the interwar empire. In “[The Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919 in the British Caribbean](#),” David Killingray maps how influenza spread in the Caribbean and considers the impact of previous waves of influenza on mortality rates in 1918–1919. Similarly, Ismail Rashid’s “[Epidemics and Resistance in Colonial Sierra Leone during the First World War](#)” shows that the 1918–9 influenza pandemic needs to be understood in relation to the earlier 1915–16 small pox epidemic in Sierra Leone. Both outbreaks strained the capacity of colonial subjects to provide tax revenue, labor,

and food supplies to an extractive imperial regime. In Sierra Leone, the pandemic was a turning point for resistance to the colonial state and those that would profit from colonialism.



The expert say in effect: “Don’t talk to anyone, don’t go near anyone, and you are safe!” No doubt. But is not this a little difficult;

From the *Daily Mirror* via [BBC News](#)

British India saw greater numbers of deaths from influenza than any other territory in the world—12 million Indian subjects lost their lives in less than a year. In “[Death and the Modern Empire: the 1918–9 Influenza Epidemic in India](#)” David Arnold shows that even while individuals dealt with the terrible personal toll of the disease, they also folded the pandemic into a larger narrative of colonial negligence. Taken together, these three accounts of the influenza show the interplay between local and global conditions, the relationship between personal experience and political mobilization, and the necessity of understanding health, disease, and debility in larger social and political contexts. Arnold’s essay helps me understand that the people who lived through the earlier pandemic did not interpret it

as a separate phenomenon from the other forces that shaped their lives.

These interwar colonial dynamics feel newly familiar to me as I watch the Black Lives Matter protests unfolding in [Portland](#), across [the United States](#), and [around the world](#). In Britain, the statue of slave trader [Edward Colston has fallen in Bristol](#), and [Rhodes will fall](#) in Oxford. We are living through [the largest political movement in the history of the United States](#), and a global uprising against police violence, white supremacy, and historical injustice.

Over 100 years ago, the immediate aftermath of the war and the pandemic led to violent confrontations between colonial subjects and the

colonial state throughout the British Empire. [Colonial subjects saw the 1918–9 pandemic as one more injustice](#) in long list of grievances against an imperial system that depended upon their labor but devalued their lives. Twenty years later, on the eve of World War II, Ireland had gained independence, in India calls for self-government within the empire had transformed into calls for independence, and in the British Caribbean riots and strikes foretold the postwar movements for decolonization. I look forward to thinking with students about the relationship of the 1918–9 influenza pandemic on the politics of the interwar period. Perhaps turning to this history might help us see the possible futures of our current moment.

WHAT WE ARE READING

Margot Minardi has been reading two fascinating books, one relatively new and another that has become a classic:

[“Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* \(University of North Carolina, 2017\)](#) connects the history of settler colonialism in California to the rise of mass incarceration in the modern United States. This book is powerful for the meticulous research Hernández conducted to piece together a suppressed history and for the way in which her narrative examines how racialization and removal affected diverse groups of Californians over the course of two and a half centuries.”

[“David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* \(Harvard, 2001\):](#) at a moment when many Confederate monuments are (rightly) coming down, Blight illuminates the context in which they were put up in the first place. He traces how dominant narratives of the Civil War bolstered white supremacy and sectional

reconciliation at the expense of Black freedom and equality.”

Doug Fix says that he is mostly reading to prepare for his new class on Japanese popular culture...but he also has a few “airplane reads” in the genre of mystery on his mind:

[“Chen Weizhi \(陳偉智\). *Inō Kanori: Taiwan lishi minzushi de zhankai* 伊能嘉矩：臺灣歷史民族誌的展開 \[Inō Kanori: The unfolding of Taiwan's historical ethnography\]. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2014.](#) A postcolonial examination of a young Japanese colonial anthropologist's ethnographic theory, investigative methods, published writings and long-term influences dealing with Taiwan's indigenous peoples.”

[“Edogawa, Ranpo \(1894-1965\). *The Edogawa Ranpo reader*. Fukuoka: Kurodahan Press, 2008.](#) Contains several of this early 20th-century Japanese mystery writer's best-known shorter narratives. Although these are best read with a

knowledge of early 20th-century Japanese cultural history, a 21st-century reader will still find them captivating.”

Josh Howe has been reading furiously in the waning days of his sabbatical. Two recent titles that have captured his historical imagination are:

“Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain* (World Publishing, 1956) is mid-century African-American ex-pat literary phenom Richard Wright’s account of the Bandung Conference, an international meeting of the non-aligned nations of Africa and Asia held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955.”

“Penny von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard, 2006) explores a program of U.S. State Department cultural exchange tours that employed American Jazz musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington as cultural ambassadors in Cold War hotspots against the background of the mid-century American Civil Right struggle.”

Jackie Dirks has been reading and listening. She has a few recommendations on both counts:

“Karla Cornejo Villavicencio’s *The Undocumented Americans* (Penguin, 2020). She’s a first-generation college graduate (Harvard) and an American Studies PhD (Yale). She describes what it means to be undocumented (‘I wanted to tell the stories of people who work as day laborers - housekeepers, construction workers, dog walkers, deliverymen - people who don’t inspire hashtags or T-shirts.’) and American (‘My family has lived in Brooklyn and Queens a combined ninety-seven years.’) Villavicencio recounts the lives of immigrants who are usually ignored, looks hard at poverty, mental illness, and other struggles faced by people who are stateless, in limbo.”

“Anthropologist Laurence Ralph’s *The Torture Letters: Reckoning with Police Violence* (University of Chicago Press, 2020) investigates victims of

violence by Chicago cops from the Area 2 precinct, where between 1972 and 1991, 125 black citizens of Chicago were detained and tortured while in custody.”

“In light of the centennial of the 19th Amendment I have been watching the thorough and informative two-part, four-hour PBS documentary *The Vote* (2020) on woman suffrage in the U.S. These new documentaries strive to illustrate class and race inequality in the mainstream suffrage movement, the activism of black woman suffrage advocates, and the different tactics employed by moderates and radicals. I have also been catching up on **the** latest episodes of *Sexing History*, podcasts by historians (mainly Gillian Frank and Lauren Jae Gutterman, with occasional production help from Devin McGeehan Muchmore, Reed American Studies ‘09) at <https://www.sexinghistory.com/>.”

Two from **Mary Ashburn Miller**:

“Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel’s *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (Michigan, 2020). After years of teaching and lecturing on Aime Cesaire in HUM 220, I have grown interested in his collaborator, wife, and fellow theorist and activist, Suzanne Cesaire. This book looks at Suzanne Cesaire in the context of broader debates about what Joseph-Gabriel calls “decolonial citizenship,” foregrounding the contributions of women like Cesaire in “transnational network[s] of Black women’s resistance” (84) in the postwar period.”

“Next up will be Rana Hogarth’s *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017). I’m thinking a lot about disease and structural vulnerability, both in preparation for my Crisis and Catastrophe class this fall and as a citizen of the world in 2020, and I’m looking forward to learning more from Hogarth’s work,

particularly her sections on yellow fever outbreaks in Philadelphia and Jamaica. This 2017 book examines the deeply entwined relationships between racial theory and medical discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Rennie Meyers ('15) and **Shir Bach ('21)** have both been reading *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013), a collection of essays from Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer on the possibility of positive, reciprocal relationships between humanity and the natural world. Says Rennie: "I read this book every summer to remind myself of how critical indigenous voices are to environmental history, cultivate a sense of place, and respect their leadership."

Lauren Mondroski ('21) and **Josh Howe** have both recently read *Carolyn Finney's Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014). Lauren writes: "This study has given me more understanding about how nature has been racialized by white institutions and cultural representations over time to exclude Black Americans. Why does this matter? For one, camping, hiking, and spending time outdoors are some of the safest ways to recreate during the pandemic-- with disproportionately higher case numbers in Black communities, it would be a lifesaving effort to make the great outdoors actually inclusive." She has also been reading Richard Powers's novel, *The Overstory* (Norton, 2018).

Sara Keleman ('17), currently working on a degree at the School of Food and Agriculture at the University of Maine-Orono, has been reading *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado (Graywolf Press, 2017). "This collection of freaky and weird of short stories is part feminist

myth and part science fiction. It's a good read for the dystopian present."

Garrett Linck ('17), also in Orono, just finished *Smith Henderson's novel Fourth of July Creek* (Ecco, 2014), "an incendiary glimpse into ideology and self reliance through the eyes of a social worker in rural northwestern Montana."

Joshua Lash (American Studies '18) just finished his first year in the School of Journalism at Columbia University. Josh says the most impactful book he has read recently is *On Michael Jackson* by Margo Jefferson (Vintage 2007), the Pulitzer Prize winning critic. "In this book, Jefferson examines the cultural impact of Michael Jackson--the king of pop--and how he held a mirror to American society, even in his darkest moments. Jefferson probes the ways that Jackson blurred lines of race, gender, and sexuality to captivate the world. And she grapples with Jackson's well-documented fall from grace and untimely death, writing insightfully on the question of whether to separate art from the artist."

From **David Kerry ('20)**: "I'd say the most impactful book that I've read this Spring/Summer was *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (Original 1942. Translated by Matthew Ward. Vintage, 1989). It's an absolutely wild book in which you're taken into the mind of a French man who murders another man seemingly without any reason at all. The novel is a mix of absurdism and existentialism and was compelling in the most frustrating way."

Natalie Murphy ('21) offers two titles from the spring and summer. First, *Inside This Place, Not Of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons*, edited by Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman (Verso, 2017). Explains Natalie: "through personal testimonies, this book describes what it is like to experience the specific type of violence that occurs at the intersection of misogyny and the carceral system. It's a crucial and harrowing text." Second, the novel *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward

(Bloomsbury, 2012), which Natalie calls “a survival story about what it is like to be pregnant, Black, and poor in Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina. It's a story about climate change and state violence told as a classic novel of family legacy and reckoning with big moral questions.”

Emily Clark ('18) is currently working as an Associate Strategist at an experience design agency called [Bluecadet](#) in Philadelphia. “We build websites, apps, and museum-esque interactives like touchscreens mainly for academic institutions, museums, non-profits, and a handful of big-name corporations,” she explains. While she is only a few chapters in, “the most influential book I’ve read as of late is *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America*, by sociologist and ethnographer Margaret A. Hagerman. Based on two years of research in an undisclosed Mid-Western city, Hagerman chronicles the way 35 white children from educated, affluent families learn about race, privilege, and inequity. Drawing heavily on interviews Hagerman conducted with the kids and their families, she describes how racial socialization is much more complex than the conversation we do or do not have around the dinner table. I think it’s a story that a lot of Reedies may find familiar.”

Sam May ('14) is also living in Philly, building databases for nonprofits and public agencies. “If I had to pick one that I've read this summer, I'd say *What Hath God Wrought* by Daniel Walker Howe. It's a nerdy book about the US from 1815 - 1848. I can't help but notice the parallels between now and then. It describes that time as a revolution in communication and that communication's subsequent effects on political life. The president defining that era was a genocidal demagogue who fancied himself a populist while using his power to pick winners in the private sector (Jackson). Abolition (of slavery) was "radical" and there were many more politically convenient options being proposed.”

Emma Chomsky ('21) recommends Anne Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. “It's about a Hmong family living in CA having fled Laos after the Vietnam War. One of the daughters has severe epilepsy, and following her story evidences the cross-cultural misunderstanding between the doctors and her parents. In the end, because of a medical mistake, the child falls into septic shock and suffers irreversible brain damage, living on in a vegetative state. The story seems important to me because it shows how incompetent the USA's medical care system can be, the government's failure to repay the Hmong for their assistance during the war, and the extent to which communication can be complicated when people have incompatible worldviews.”

Says **Caden Wait ('21)**, “*Arturo Escobar’s Designs for the Pluriverse* has been a vital resource for me over the past two months. It may be of particular use to my fellow demonstrators and, more broadly, all those who are committed to the project of world repair but struggle to envision any meaningfully transformed future.”

Emmet Powers ('21) has been reading *Under the Banner of Heaven* by Jon Krakauer. “In this bestseller that I've noticed in many homes' bookshelves, Krakauer blends a well crafted and readable history of Mormonism with a chilling account of a murder committed by contemporary religious extremists. Reading this taught me how significant Mormonism is to 19th century American history, and dispelled a lot of my previous misconceptions about the religion.” Emmett has also been reading *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin.

From **Nick Campigli ('21)**: “I have been reading *King Leopold’s Ghost* by Adam Hochschild. The book is a history of King Leopold’s private state in the Congo through the lens of its major actors (such as Leopold) down to individual colonial

agents and the indigenous people who worked and lived in the Congo. While I don't think this book is directly related to the present moment, I think Hochschild's emphasis on elevating and articulating black voices (and those who are marginalized in general) to create a fuller picture of this period of history is essential to the work of the contemporary historian."

Ethan Sandweiss ('18) Recently read *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, which he calls "an inadvertently complementary combination. They both gave me a lot to work with while I get used to my job as a mid-level functionary."

Among a torrent of other titles, **Jack Mader ('21)** recommended *Susan Jacoby's The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought*, which he appreciated for the way in articulated the

specific intellectual commitments of Ingersoll's philosophical position, which, despite the name, was in fact organized and logically consistent. **Rebecca Lewit ('21)** says, "I've just started reading *Our History Is The Future* by Nick Estes. It is an exploration of Indigenous resistance against the United States from the perspective of the protests at Standing Rock. Raised on the East Coast, Indigenous history was taught to us as something that was stagnant and existed only in the past, and while I have learned more about the brutal realities of colonization since I was first educated I had never before been able to read such a cohesive counter-narrative to the story I had always been told about the US. While I'm not done with the book yet, it has already begun to impact the way I think and I can tell it will continue to do so as I finish it."