

UnTextbooked

A history podcast for the future.

Transcript: [Best of Season 1](#)

Season - Episode

Bonus Episode

Released (YYYY-MM-DD)

2021-02-04

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Bethany Denton 0:09

Hi, I'm Bethany Denton, one of the editors of UnTextbooked. We've just wrapped up our first season shows and we're hard at work on the next. Now if this is your first time listening to the show, welcome, we're glad to have you. For the uninitiated. UnTextbooked is a history podcast where teenagers interview historians to better understand the world. In our first season, we've explored gender medicine, food piracy. And that's just the beginning. And so since we're on a break, I just wanted to take some time to share some of the moments that really stuck with me from season one. And to be honest, it was really hard to narrow it down to just a handful of clips, because really, every episode left me with at least one aha moment.

So this episode that you're listening to right now, this is just a sample. But I hope it will encourage you to go back and listen to our entire first season. So I'm starting off with a clip that I think does a really good job explaining just some of the ways that racism can influence our criminal justice system. It's from an interview with author Matthew Van Meter on his book, *Deep Delta Justice*, which tells the story of *Duncan v. Louisiana*, a civil rights era Supreme Court case that guaranteed jury trials for all Americans, at the heart of that case was a black teenager named Gary Duncan. Here's UnTextbooked producer, Elliot Smith.

Elliot Smith 1:30

I want to talk a little bit about some of the roadblocks you face on the path to Supreme Court, one of those being bail. There's this scene where Gary's in jail, and his family members are trying to pay bail, and they run into obstacle after obstacle, trying to pay it where it just can't work. So why was it that people in Louisiana who are part of the court could create all these roadblocks which interfere with Gary's ability to have justice?

Matthew Van Meter 2:04

The thing about courts and the thing about the law is that they operate according to the whims of the people who control their levers. So take bail, extensively, bail is an amount of money that you pay to the court that's held in escrow that is meant to encourage you to come back, you

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show up for your court date, you get your money back, right. So it deposit essentially keep you from running away. That's how it was intended, I suppose to function. In real life, bail is often punitive, that isn't used to punish people. Or to make a statement or political statement or some other sort of statement. High bail is seen as make making some type of speech, right? It's saying this, this is really bad, or this person is really dangerous, or whatever. And so within that context, it is not at all surprising and should not be at all surprising to anyone who's familiar with the way that the American justice system worked and works. That bail was very difficult for Gary Duncan's family to post. And that's because the person who was there to receive the bail did not want to release Gary Duncan. And that's the only reason in that sense. This is not a story about the 60s at all. It's not a story about the civil rights movement. It's not a story about Jim Crow. All of those things, of course, are underlying because race is underlying all of this. And anybody who looks at the story knows that. But legally, it has nothing to do with that. And that's the exact situation. In every jurisdiction in this country right now. There are people right now, right, the second who are in jail for battery who would not be there, but for the color of their skin.

Bethany Denton 4:00

That was an excerpt from the episode how a black teenager and his young lawyer changed America's criminal justice system. Another moment that stuck with me was in an interview that UnTextbooked Producer grace Davis did. She interviewed food historian Rachel Loudan, about her book, cuisine and Empire. And in that interview, Rachel loudan and brings up this really interesting point about how culinary inventions are usually reserved for the privileged in society. She references a woman named Margarita that she met in Mexico, who spent the majority of her days grinding corn by hand to feed her family.

Grace Davis 4:38

There's this one quote in cuisine and empire that I found really interesting, and I was wondering if you could explain it a bit. It's from the German sociologist Werner some part and the quotation is luxury, not necessity has been an engine of change. What does it mean? Exactly,

Rachel Laudan 5:01

you know, the phrase Necessity is the mother of invention is one that gets kicked around all the time. The trouble is that if you are in a position like Margarita, experimenting with food, or with anything else, but we're just going to talk about food now means that you have to be able to waste thing. If you want to try out a completely new cake. And when I say that, I don't mean just a new recipe for a cake, but you want to say, oh, I've got a great idea. Supposing we, instead of creaming the butter and sugar first and you know, we started with a flower, and did it all in a different order. That might work and it might not. But if it doesn't work, you've got to throw it away. You're not going to throw things away. If you are living right at the edge, the people like Margarita are not going to say Oh, today, I think there's a better way to make tortillas. I'm not going to cook the maize first and then grind it, I'm going to grind it first and then cook it and see if that works. They might lose all the food for the day. That that's not something they want to risk. And this is not lack of imagination. It's not lack of interest. It's not in any way a criticism. It's

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just to say that the people who have the surplus where they can say oh, let's try something completely different, tend to be the people who are the wealthier people in society.

Bethany Denton 6:49

That was an excerpt from the episode called most Americans eat like kings without realizing it. damnation to the governor and confusion to the colony, proclaimed an 18th century pirate shortly before being hanged. That quote, damnation to the governor and confusion to the colony, is the title of our 10th episode. It's an interview with historian Marcus Rediker, author of villains of all nations. In this clip UnTextbooked Producer Ming Wei cyprian Fasquelle asks Marcus Rediker about how piracy has survived from ancient times, all the way to today.

Ming-Wei Cyprien Fasquelle 7:28

While I was reading, I was noticing these little dynamics between groups that actually looked very familiar to certain situations we have today. Large governments putting pressure on foreign powers that have different systems of government that could work until you squash them. Right. And so I was wondering whether you thought there were any modern equivalents to either the establishment at that time or pirates today?

Marcus Rediker 7:58

I think they're, they're examples all over the world. There are everywhere for people who are who are basically pushed down by the circumstances of their lives, who are actively dreaming of something different. Now, whether it's returning to the land that has been taken away from them, or returning to a better, more self sufficient life, I think the kinds of dreams that we see institutionalized on a pirate ship are fairly common throughout the world, it's just that we can't usually see them because of the oppressive weight of circumstances. And I would even add, you know, piracy still goes on. Now, it's not the sort of thing it was in the 18th century is much more local mystic, and sporadic although a few years ago, you may recall, we had quite an outburst of piracy in Somalia of the Somalian coast. And I used to get these calls from journalists all the time. And, and frequently the question they would ask is, so the the ultimate message was tell us that these pirates are not like the romantic outlaws that we knew about from the golden age of piracy? And I would basically say, no, they're exactly like them. There are poor people whose lives have been damaged, in some cases by European overfishing off their traditional waters, in some cases, by the dumping of waste by European countries. And these are poor people who when they see a rich ship go by they try to attack it. So So these kinds of things are not uncommon in a world of such vast inequality. Pirates, I can tell you basically thought we don't have to obey the laws that rich men make for their own protection. So So I think it's this matter of what's what's law is not always what's adjust

Bethany Denton 10:03

In many of our interviews, one thing that came up again and again was this idea that 2020 was a year of racial reckoning in America, something maybe even on par with the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s. That's why historian Susan Neiman thinks anyway, Susan

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Neiman is an American southerner who spent decades living in Germany, studying “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung”. That's German for working off the past. And it's a collective process of reconciliation that German people did after Nazi ism led to millions of deaths in the Holocaust. UnTextbooked Producer Lap Nguyen nginterviewed Susan Nieman about her book, learning from the Germans, which draws a connection between Germany after World War Two, and the period of reconstruction after the Civil War ended slavery,

Lap Nguyen 10:49

we had an opportunity, but we dropped it basically, after 1877. Now that we've dropped that opportunity, we see the lost cause narrative, you know, the idea of glorifying the Confederate history right, having statues put up having this taught in textbooks for decades and decades and decades, that narrative has seeped in. And so I guess the question is, is it too late now, for America to have its own version of working off the past?

Susan Neiman 11:18

It is absolutely not too late for America to have its version of working off the past? No, not in the least. And it's happening right now. You have more white people, according to every poll, supporting Black Lives Matter than ever supported the civil rights movement. It is not too late at all. I I'm actually extremely hopeful that Americans really are confronting our past, you know, to a degree that we've never done before that But you see, this is exactly what you learn from the Germans. There's always going to be pushback. Okay. Fernandez, Alfa bhajan working off the past. It's not like a vaccine, you don't do one shot of it, and have people open their eyes and say, oh, gosh, I'm so sorry, I was a racist. I'm not going to do that. Again. Racism is a deep, complex structure, which involves not just propositions, it involves emotions. It's something that gets cultivated in childhood. So some people have compared the German nations working through the past to kind of national psychotherapy, and there's something in that. It's it's a process that involves a lot of work. And I believe there's a process we can go through and come out the other side. And I think Germany shows that.

Bethany Denton 13:02

That was an excerpt from the episode called Germany addressed to Teresa's past, can America do the same? So I want to share just one more clip with you. It's from an interview with author Mikki Kendall, who wrote Amazon's abolitionists and activists. It's a graphic novel that explores the historical contributions of women. The story she shares are the kinds of stories that she wished she had learned in her history classes, instead of the whitewashed history that she was taught, which was unrelatable and boring. And so UnTextbooked Producer Sophia Andrews, asked Mikki Kendall, about how we can fix the problems of history education for future generations.

Sophia Andrews 13:44

Do you think we'll ever get to a place where our history books and our textbooks are sharing stories of all people and not just one side of history?

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Mikki Kendall 13:54

I think we are headed in that direction. It is much easier to convey a nuanced history when you are using a text that is both visual and literary. Because what happens is that for people who will sometimes be not good readers, and not being a good reader is not the same as not being a person who is smart, or not being a person who wants to learn it just means that you struggle with the arbitrary symbols we have made up to represent these concepts is easier for them to get involved in history. When it's visually engaging, it is easier for people even people who aren't good readers, but who might think of history is boring, because there's only so many dates you could read. When it's a story that draws you in and I think we are headed towards a place Fingers crossed knock on wood, that we will see much more of this being used in classrooms. We will see many more books that tell us the story. Show us the stories of these historical figures and fill in the spaces. right because you would never know about Japanese internment camps in In the US, or what happened to sort of black soldiers after World War Two, if it weren't for the people who kept telling that history, even if it didn't make it to a standard textbook, writing these things down illustrating these things is sometimes the best way to share history with the next generation.

Bethany Denton 15:30

Thanks so much for listening. We'll have links to the full interviews of each clip you heard in our episode description, and you can listen to our entire catalogue@untextbooked.com We're also on Instagram, tik tok and Twitter at UnTextbooked Music by Silas Bowen and Coleman Hamilton, who are a senior and recent graduate of walnut School for the Arts in Massachusetts. UnTextbooked is produced by teenagers from around the country who are curious about the world and inspired to learn history in a new way. Does that sound like you? Do you have big questions that you want to ask a historian then go to UnTextbooked comm slash apply and fill out the form. And if you like what we do and want to help us make it even better go to untextbooked.com slash support. UnTextbooked is edited by me, Bethany Denton with help from Jeff emtman. Our executive producer is Fernande Raine. UnTextbooked is a project of Got History organization that believes in a world where all young people can advance civic wellbeing for themselves, society and the planet.