

New Museum School Podcast Transcript– 2019/2020

PODCAST TITLE: *Think a likkle: lineage of thought*

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HOST INSTITUTION: *National Trust – Marketing & Comms*

SCRIPT

NMS INTRO STING

LINK 1

Hi, I'm Ellie. I'm part of a work-based learning programme called the New Museum School. I'm part of the National Trust's London Marketing and Communications Team, and I work with the Trust's smaller London properties. That involves Carlyle's House, Fenton House, and 2 Willow Road - and I'm enjoying it...

LINK 2

On a crisp October morning, I exited Sloane Square station to a warm welcome and hug from Lin. She's been the live-in custodian of Carlyle's House for over 20 years. She's lovely.

We crossed Sloane Square and walked to Carlyle's House in Cheyne Walk. We spoke about how the area had changed. Away from the posh shops and eateries, we turned the corner into a quiet street. It's been a hundred and thirty-nine years since Thomas and Jane Carlyle lived there, but walking into the house was like walking back in time..

LINK 3

The entrance is impactful. The walls are dark and intense. Lin explains the walls were wallpapered with imitation oak wallpaper, then varnished to avoid bugs and cover cracks. The original colour was much brighter back in the day. Now they have darkened over time as they age. It takes care and effort to conserve the house.

We descend into the basement-esque area, and I meet another Linda, who's also lovely! Chatting about their many roles, I realised how much love and effort these two women and their volunteers put in.

QUESTION 1

Sounds nice! What made you choose the National Trust? Isn't it a bit whitewashed though? How do you remain yourself? Don't you feel conflicted?

LINK 4

The National Trust has a huge platform as the largest conservation charity in Europe. I'm intrigued by the National Trust and how others in the heritage sector are shifting the narrative on under-represented histories, and I want to be a part of that.

In my application, I wrote...

Coming from a Nigerian British background that is under-celebrated and under-represented in Western heritage, I have a strong drive to bring about change and share hidden narratives.

*I am committed to continuously learning about our collective human stories, and the empowering effect it can have on us as a society. I am a self-starter so I created and developed my own business called **Heritage & History Cards**. It's a game that celebrates the historically uncelebrated, overlooked, or marginalised, and tackles the hard to talk about parts of history, for example, colonialism.*

QUESTION 2

So, what's the hidden bit? Was Carlyle a racist?

LINK 5

That's direct. (*Deep breath.*) Short answer, 'Yes', he displayed anti-black beliefs. Now the long answer ...

LINK 6

Due to the nature of British history, I'd known that Carlyle's history would be questionable or downright racist. I discovered Thomas Carlyle had used an alias to write a pro-slavery paper: '*Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question*'. Then four years later: '*Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*'. Disturbingly, on the official website and in the house, there's little to no mention of this. Yet, he is lauded as a great thinker.

More positively, National Trust projects such as **Colonial Countryside**, **Under-represented Histories**, and **Cornershop Stories** are examples of prioritising untold stories and perspectives. This got me thinking. Why are so many stories untold or hidden? Is there an effort to control what we think? If not, then why are so many stories untold?

As a fast-paced society, time to research and reflect is limited. Hence, we trust the information we're given, as though it's the only information that matters. If we prioritise independent learning, what would we find out?

QUESTION 3

Wow! Why should we be told these stories? It's uncomfortable...

LINK 7

These are uncomfortable questions and uncomfortable stories. The awkwardness we feel comes from the challenge of getting used to not thinking of a person in a binary of good or bad.

LINK 8

On the track, *Maangamizi*, from Akala's album, *The Thieves Banquet*, the lyrics go:

*"If you ain't heard of [Nanny of the Maroons](#) or Bogle
You probably believe what they told you."*

Paul Bogle was a Jamaican national hero. One untold story is the link between Thomas Carlyle, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, another Jamaican national hero.

I encourage everyone to read about the Morant Bay Rebellion, a Caribbean David and Goliath story. Paul Bogle and George William Gordon were murdered, along with over 400 Jamaican men, women and children, on the instruction of Colonial Governor Eyre. Back in the UK, there was a huge uproar about the handling of the rebellion.

In 1866, John Stuart Mill set up and chaired the Jamaica Committee to examine the atrocities committed in Jamaica in the course of ending the rebellion. Thomas Carlyle set up a rival committee to defend Eyre. His supporters included **John Ruskin**, **Charles Kingsley**, **Charles Dickens** and **Alfred, Lord Tennyson**.

INTERVIEW CLIP 1 | Interview with Natalia Nano Lester-Bush, National Trust, London

For me, it's more about being comfortable with the discomforts, which is not British society, and also being comfortable with not finding a resolution. It takes bravery. It takes boldness, and it takes vulnerability. It takes humility. And they again are not deemed attractive qualities for the most part.

LINK 9

That was **Natalia Nano Lester-Bush** at the **National Trust**. She manages work on inclusion and diversity in London and the South-East.

I felt this discomfort thinking about how to define **Thomas Carlyle**. I started to think about his thought patterns, but they didn't start with him.

Carlyle wrote: *"The history of the world is but the biography of great men."*

LINK 10

Will thoughts by men always be based on the thoughts of other men before them? There seems to be a lineage of thought that is as important as a bloodline. It is this *'lineage of thought'* I would like you to focus on. We don't realise how much of the past influences the present.

Here's the **West London Press, June 5th, 1936** writing about the handing over of Carlyle's House to the National Trust. It says: *"A great deal of nonsense was talked about Carlyle.. mostly by clever people of the younger generation .. One of the things said was that Carlyle instituted Fascism - (laughter) - although Carlyle died in 1881 and Fascism began some time in the 20th century."*

The article goes on to say, men of 'calibre' didn't think like that and that Carlyle wrote about the conditions of the poor.

The architects of our present time are long gone but their thoughts live on in our actions.

QUESTION 4

What if someone says, *"It was just the times - we can't judge them by modern standards"*?

LINK 11

If it was the norm, why did Carlyle and friends fall out? John Stuart Mill or William Morris, for example? William Morris responded to being asked about the formative influences of his socialist doctrine with: *"Carlyle and Ruskin, but somebody should have been beside Carlyle and punched his head every five minutes."*

QUESTION 5

Is any of this relevant to our present day though?

LINK 12

Thomas Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-worship* book and the lineage of thought made me think about modern-day hero culture and my favourite graphic novel, *Watchmen*.

Alan Moore's *Watchmen* breaks down the idea of heroes. It's unique because it exposes all of their flaws, motivations, criminality, and villainy. *Watchmen* characters like Veidt, the Comedian, Dr Manhattan, and Rorschach exemplify characters that are hard to put in a binary, a superhero trope of good or bad, good or evil.

Great men, heroes, superheroes - these cultural icons are powerful, and their narratives often benefit from that. Stories of powerful people are protected and preserved, instead of told explicitly, to uphold their image.

Veidt is a great study of power. In order to stop World War 3, he simulates a nightmare and kills half of New York - which stops World War 3 and people are united. Is he villain or hero? **Natalia Nano Lester-Bush** at the **National Trust**:

INTERVIEW CLIP 2 | Interview with Natalia Nano Lester-Bush, National Trust, London

I noticed it obviously in my experience as an ethics teacher and philosophy teacher. I think I just sit more comfortably with the unknown that I find often comes up in my inclusion conversation. So, for me, I just think the word but is so unnecessary and binary - he's both.

LINK 13

Watchmen does not present heroes as unquestionable beings of unquestionable good or evil, it doesn't omit difficult parts of the hero's story, but instead invites the viewer to think. This level of honesty is what is needed in the telling of stories of influential figures such as Carlyle.

I'd like to end on the question. Do people break from the lineage of thought?

Thank you for listening.

NMS OUTRO STING

SCRIPT ENDS