

Episode 0: Introduction to This is Problematic

Join Hannah and Easton as they introduce you to This is Problematic, a Conner Prairie podcast! Discussion of the upcoming first season of the podcast and what you have to look forward to.

Transcription:

Hannah: Welcome to the This Is Problematic podcast brought to you by Conner Prairie Museum.

Easton: Alright, we're so excited to have you all with us, however few or many you may be as we take a journey through problematic history.

Hannah: I'm Hannah.

Easton: And I'm Easton.

Hannah: And today we're going to be diving into our own histories and discussing what our first series will be examining.

Easton: Let's dive in.

Hannah: Let's go ahead and explore a little bit about both of us. We'll give you a little bit of an introduction to who we are and what we hope this podcast can accomplish.

Easton: Absolutely. Do you want to go first or should I?

Hannah: You can go first.

Easton: All right. Before I start real quick, I want to give a shout out to Ryan for getting our mic set up and all wonderful, putting the covers on. Couldn't have done it without you. A king.

So, basically my name is Easton. I'm from the beautiful city of Cincinnati, Ohio. Best city on earth. And it's a great city with a great history. But there are some problematic and

unappreciated stuff in there for sure. And trust me, I'll try not to make this a Cincinnati podcast, but I will be talking about some of that.

I guess my historical love started back when we called history social studies. It was elementary school, had to be about third grade. And I remember it so clearly because it was the first time I'd ever talked about Native American history outside of Thanksgiving. So we weren't learning about the Pilgrims, we were learning about who Tecumseh was and what his name meant and the battles he was in.

And I don't know, it was just it had to have been third or fourth grade. And ever since then, every time my mom was like, what was your favorite, you know, favorite part of the day? Because she would ask me that every day. I'd be like, oh, social studies. Social studies. Had to be social studies all the time. And I just kind of took that with me and through high school and all the way to, I guess, my sophomore year. Sophomore year was when I determined that history was what I wanted to do with my life.

So there is a museum in the city of Cincinnati right there on the banks called the [National Underground Railroad Freedom Center](#). And I highly recommend going. It's maybe not one you take your kids to just for a fun day. It's more of like a solemn, reflective experience. It's just about the African-American journey from slavery and beyond. And it's a really great space. But they had something called the Youth Docent Program, which I took part in, and that was just learning all the historical background and doing research and then going out onto the museum floor and just talking to people. And from that point on, it was just history was what I wanted to do. I didn't know exactly what I was going to do. But, you know, that's part of being a history person. So I majored in history. I went to the University of Cincinnati—Cats by 90—and four years later I have a major in history. I have an a minor in anthropology and a certificate in international human rights and here I am at Conner Prairie sharing the mic with my wonderful colleague, Hannah.

Hannah: So I'm Hannah Murphy. I grew up in the northeast of Scotland, actually near Aberdeen, and I went to the University of Strathclyde for my undergraduate degree. I graduated with a degree in history and in politics, and I always thought I would end up working in politics. I always thought history would be a hobby. I loved going to museums. I was always that nerd on holiday who would want to go to museums instead of doing, you know, other things.

And so as I moved through my degree, I studied abroad my third year here in the U.S. at the University of Iowa. And I was really lucky to get some experience both working in an archive

and then I spent the summer working in a museum here in Southern Indiana, and that experience really gave me the drive to try and make a career of museum work. And so after graduation, I got a job in Raleigh, North Carolina, and I started working in a museum there part-time while I also was substitute teaching.

And then I eventually secured a full time position here at Conner Prairie in interpretation. And so that's how I really got my start here on the Prairie. I would be out on the grounds interpreting to guests and then also supervising our interpreters. And I loved that work, but I found my passion even more so was for behind the scenes work, for research.

And so I began to move into the research realm. I started my master's degree in public history and library sciences with a specialization in archives and I moved over to our research department last year, and now I get to work alongside Easton and libraries and archives finding stories. And so I'm so excited to get to bring some of them to you this season.

Easton really covered some of his childhood experiences with history, and so I'd love to talk a little bit about mine. Obviously, my childhood experiences were different growing up on a different continent.

Easton: Oh yeah.

Hannah: And so they were very European centric. We grew up doing projects every year in school, throughout primary school, and so we would focus on different periods of history, you know, focused on ancient Egyptians, focused on the Vikings, focused on the Middle Ages and not much American history. As we moved through secondary school, the only real focus on American history, I remember there being was on the Oregon Trail. I remember us doing, you know, some activities about that era. We talked a little bit about American history in May. We called it Modern Studies, which was kind of political studies, classes about the American dream a little bit and the health care system. And then we had the option in what we call sixth year, our final year to take advanced higher. And some schools, I think, did the American Civil War. I want to say that that was an option. But we focused on Russia.

So I did Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1954 for the year. And so that was really that kind of specialization they gave us. And then in university, some American studies I did in my undergrad, more so during my year here at Iowa, for sure.

Easton: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah. So I would say my passions in history, I'll talk a little bit about my focus and I think, do you want to talk a little bit about yours as well? So you get to know a little bit about us and our interests?

Easton: Sure. Absolutely. Major props to you, by the way. You got some expertise going on now.

Hannah: So do you.

Easton: The thing is, it's interesting that you said going back a little bit about learning about the Civil War. So the Civil War was kind of a weird thing when I was in high school specifically because in high school I think that's when paths started to diverge and you had more and I'm using air quotes right now, but like advanced history being taught by different teachers.

And then you had different history being taught for the people who I guess their grades reflected a certain path or whatever. I don't know the ins and outs. All I know is that you'd walk into a classroom like senior year and, you know, you'd say something about the Civil War, and then half the class would be like, "Yeah, it's interesting that we didn't teach about ... They didn't teach us about the Civil War," and the other half the class is like, "Wait, where were y'all like, of course we learned about the Civil War." And I don't know if it was too controversial or what, but it was like for people who were on my path, I guess we just kind of doubled back on modern European history in high school, and then by the time it was over, it was just kind of over.

And so some of us had to learn about civil war in college that was the first time I ever learned anything about the Civil War outside of, you know, Abraham Lincoln and Reconstruction and all that stuff.

But I think that curiosity is kind of what led into my specialization. So I really like that period. I attribute it back to the youth docent program, I really do because that was the first time I heard about reconstruction and what not just what led to the Civil War and what happened, but also like what happened afterwards and how that journey is still coming into the present day and reconstruction's failures and, you know, things that you know, things that kind of shape black culture today because that was just kind of lacking where I was going to school, you know, not to call anybody out, but there are definitely places where you can rediscover things about your own culture that you can't learn in school. That's just my opinion.

Hannah: For sure. For sure. I would say my interests tend to lean a little bit towards the gender history side of things. I'm really interested in all silenced histories, but particularly women's history and history of gender. I'm also really interested, I think definitely my experience of having migrated myself gave me a real interest in migrant histories. And it's interesting to learn about people who have been moved or are chose to move and the experiences that they had, the retentions they brought with them, find that really, really interesting.

And then I would say the final kind of area that really interests me is conflict history. Especially, I'm really a 20th century historian, somewhat back into the 19th, but a lot of the work I do here is kind of 19th. We've done a lot of work in black American history throughout the kind of 18th and 19th centuries. We're opening a new exhibit this year, PLPG.

And so that's really looking at African American history from pre-colonial Africa, African history right through to the modern day here in Indiana.

Easton: Yeah, I have a question.

Hannah: Yeah.

Easton: What does PLPG stand for?

Hannah: Oh, that's a phenomenal question. Okay. So Promised Land as Proving Ground. What does that mean?

Easton: Promised Land as Proving Ground. Well, it's basically about the - it's referring to the Northwest Territory, which was Indiana before Indiana was a state and the whole thought of Indiana being a promised land because slavery was illegal, discrimination was not illegal, but slavery was illegal here. So when black folks started coming from the south and started moving in, they saw this, you know, quote unquote, pioneer settlement.

This was the frontier, basically. And they saw that as a promised land to we could really build something here and build something special. And with Indiana's very, very messy, complicated history with race relations, it's kind of it's definitely what you call the silenced history. I've never heard that before, but I like that because it doesn't really get talked about.

But there were black folk who wanted to come to Indiana, wanted to stay in Indiana, and saw that as not just a promised land for them, but a proving ground to show that, hey, we can do

exactly what other folks do and we can do it just as good, if not better. And now we have black settlements that to this day still exist in Indiana, but we'll get into that later.

Hannah: Yeah, those will certainly be some of the episodes. As we travel through this journey with you, we're going to take you through many of the areas that we've worked in, the stories that we've found. We're super excited to be able to unveil and start to take you through a lot of the work we've been doing.

Okay, so I think that's a decent amount about us as individuals. Shall we talk a little bit about what we want this podcast to be?

Easton: I think we should. I think we should.

Hannah: Okay. So we talk first about the rating system. I think that's an important part. I mean, a lot of what we do here on the Prairie is very family friendly and we love that work and we're passionate about that. But there are also elements of history that unfortunately are not family friendly. They're not clean and rosy. And we want this to be a space in which you can learn with us and explore some of these more difficult parts of history.

So there will be episodes that are a little more - a little more lighthearted and that you probably can listen to with kids in the car. But there may be other ones that you don't want the kids and the granny in the car for. And so we'll give you a rating at the start of each episode. Be that G, PG-13 potentially R on the odd occasion just so you have an idea of what you're getting yourself in for.

Easton: I agree. That's very important because you don't want to just don't want to traumatize granny.

Hannah: Informed consent is always what we're here for. Truth. So I think an important question is what do we mean by problematic history? Do you want me to feel this one or do you want to go ahead and take it?

Easton: Field it.

Hannah: Okay. So by problematic history, we really mean anything that has been purposefully silenced, whether that be because of colonization, whether that be because of lack of individual interests or because of power and money. And these topics that have been purposely silenced or ignored and haven't been brought to light, that are still causing harm and damage both within the US and across the world.

And so only by understanding and exploring these topics can we begin to solve some of the problems that exist in our world and heal some of the wounds. Do you think you have anything?

Easton: No, I think you absolutely got it. I mean, problematic history is just history that's kind of been swept under the rug and history that deserves a voice. And we think that, you know, if other people aren't going to talk about it, we definitely want to at least give it an hour or an hour and a half to get the conversation going again potentially.

Hannah: I think with the voices part, you raise a really important part as well. Our goal with this podcast is never to speak over other people. It's to elevate voices that are already speaking from these communities and invite people in to be in conversation with us. We certainly do not have all the answers nobody does. And so we just want to make sure that we're bringing these topics to a public forum and providing a space for open and honest discussion.

Easton: So do you want to just run through potential topics?

Hannah: Yeah, I think we should talk a little bit about some of the topics so you can know what you might want to join us for this season.

Easton: Yes, absolutely. Well, I can talk on one that is very, very close to Conner Prairie's heart. Of course, we're going to talk about first person interpretation. So for those of you who do not know, Conner Prairie's a living history museum. So you step over a threshold and you're back in 1836 Prairie Town, Civil War Journey, places like that. 1863. Oh, yes. Civil War Journey is 1863. Yes. Keep me accountable. Keep my dates together. I will forget.

First person interpretation is basically what we... the quote unquote actors that step into the space. That's first person interpretation. They're interacting with you, but they're also period specific. And then third person interpretation is basically a person in modern, you know, blue shirt, Conner Prairie shirt, nametag, who's speaking from a modern 2022 perspective.

Hannah: Your slightly more traditional museum docent type of individual. We don't call them docents here on the Prairie, but a lot of museums do. And so it's more of that position as you might know it.

Easton: Yes. And I have actually been to Conner Prairie before. At the end of the youth docent program, I came to Conner Prairie and got to interact with both manners of interpretation. But

for the first person interpretation episode, we are basically going to speak on how it's been done well in some spaces, how it's been done, not so well because you can imagine having any manner of folk coming in and interacting with people from the past comes with its fair share of challenges specifically, you know, are do we call them re-enactors?

Are they interpreters? You know, we're going to have conversation on what defines a first person and maybe a loose first person interpretation, because there are many way more different ways of doing it than you could ever imagine. It's not cut and dry. It's very it's very it's kind of complicated, but it's kind of problematic, too.

Hannah: And I think an important thing to talk about there is that we are never really going to limit ourselves to only talking about what we're doing here on the prairie. We really want to talk about the museum field as a whole, and so we'll discuss what we're doing here. But we will set it in the context of the wider museum field and hopefully invite some professionals in the coming months to come and speak to us from other institutions, from the academic field. That is our plan to make sure that we are engaging with the wider field as a whole.

Easton: Mm hmm. And you coming from the interpretation department, I mean, you're going to have great insight on that so.

Hannah: I have some stories.

Easton: Exciting. All right. Well, are we in the spirit of continuing our episodes...

Hannah: Which other ones we might want to dive in to here? Oh, I think Albert Cashier is a really good one. I think we will certainly have an episode coming up focusing on silenced histories. A lot of these episodes will focus on different elements of silenced histories, as well as issues that are ongoing problems ongoing in the museum field.

And so the untold stories of our LGBTQ plus community. Albert Cashier is an individual who served during the Civil War and served as was born, uh, female gendered but served as male gendered and then lived out the rest of his life as a man. And so we would love to talk about his experiences and the ways that he has and hasn't been remembered in our nation's history.

Easton: Mm hmm. Absolutely. And then we're also going to speak on some more general topics. Like, for example, this was pretty broad diversity. Sorry, diversity. My mom is gonna have a fit if I say diversity, diversity within the museum field, that's gender, race, etc., because there is a conversation to be had about why in both teaching and in the museum field.

So maybe those are two separate episodes. But in the museum's field especially, there's not much diversity. There are a lot of spaces where certain communities will not go because they don't really feel like their history is being told. They don't really feel welcome. It could be a number of factors, but we're basically just addressing just instances where institutions have tried to reach out to different groups and how it can be done well and how it can be done not so well.

And that, of course, is a far reaching topic, but we don't shy away from those now.

Hannah: Absolutely not. I think another one really close to our hearts is the topic of criminal justice. In the United States in particular, we found the amazing story of a man named Kent Brown who lived in Richmond, Indiana, in the 1880s. He was unfortunately killed because of a relationship he had with a white woman. Her and her white boyfriend chose to take Kent's life, and they were not imprisoned for a very long time before they were pardoned by the governor of our state here in Indiana.

And so I think that opens up some important discussions that continue to this day. And by the way, the criminal justice system punishes certain individuals more than others. And the way our pardon system works and so we will hopefully have a guest come and speak with us who has a little more expertise on that topic, I think as well.

But it's certainly an important one to be diving into.

Easton: Absolutely. It's exciting.

Hannah: You can probably tell that these topics get us pretty excited and we love that. Are there any others you kind of want to give a teaser of or.

Easton: I'll do one more. We're also going to talk a little bit on the destruction of neighborhoods, specifically from the gentrification front, talking about areas, of course, in Indiana, we have places like Ransom Place and IUPUI. And through our own research, we've discovered a ton about what used to be here and what is no longer here and just how instances in cities all across America, it seems like they're very they're very apparent themes in what neighborhoods seem to be rife for gentrification and exactly where, you know, as soon as things start getting built, like there, there's just it's like a domino effect.

Next thing you know, the people who were once there aren't there anymore, where do they go? Because those people don't just go away and things like that. It's more than just giving a

neighborhood a facelift. And we're going to talk about that. Who really reaps the benefits of the amenities once they're there? You know, unfortunately, as much as I love Cincinnati, it's guilty of that, too.

And it continues. And it's kind of hard to have conversations about gentrification because there's issues of class and politics and race and human impact. So it gets messy, but it's definitely there histories here, some brief, some not so brief. And it's a national issue, especially in the Midwest. And we definitely want to talk about that.

Hannah: Yeah. And I think we're going to aim to engage with and that I know we're going to aim to engage with projects already ongoing that have been attempting to bring these issues to light and maybe start to provide some, some solutions and some ways of dealing with these issues. Like there's been an amazing project the last few years out of Minnesota, out of Minneapolis, looking at racial housing covenants.

And so these kind of historic projects we are definitely going to dive into when we're talking about these projects, you know, we want to bring to your attention some of the ways that you can be engaging with this work and be helping us to bring these problems to light and hopefully start to heal some of the wounds that exist surrounding these topics.

And so yeah, okay. I think that's a good summary of ourselves and our upcoming season. We are so excited to have you joining us.

Easton: Yes, absolutely. Wherever you may be. If you can't, you know, if you can't make it into Conner Prairie or don't feel comfortable or just want to take us with you after you've left, you know, we want to reach out to anyone who's got a heart beating for some history.

Hannah: So feel free to go ahead and share this with anyone that you think might find it interesting. We can find you on all of your normal podcast places Apple Music, Spotify, and all of those places as well as on our website. Thank you all for listening.

Easton: All right.