

The unlikely podcaster: How this Dallas man became America's foremost history teller

By **Mac Engel** · July 6, 2022

Photo: Jordan Fraker — Former SMU marketing employee Lindsay Graham has become one of the top podcasters in the U.S. Among some of his better-known series is "American History Tellers."

Lindsay Graham likes to say “before his career in politics,” he worked in the marketing department at SMU who dabbled in producing and composing music.

This was long before his profile reached a point where he is routinely confused for the Senator from South Carolina, whose name is the same but is spelled differently (the Senator spells his first name, “Lindsey.”)

This was also before the resident of Dallas received a shout-out from actor George Clooney.

The podcast genre has produced a handful of unlikely success stories, of which Lindsay Graham is a distinguished member.

What began as a side gig that he started in his house morphed into a full-time career, his own company, and some of the best podcasts today. He has grown into the role of American historian.

For more than a generation, authors such as David McCullough, Stephen Ambrose, Michael Beschloss, Shelby Foote and a few others resided on the mantle of America's foremost historians.

It's a natural evolution that someone would fill that role in the podcast world.

“How did I get here? It's as surprising to me as anyone,” he said in a phone interview. “All of my education is in business and marketing.”

He is the host of the popular podcasts “American History Tellers,” “American Scandal,” “Business Movers,” and “History Daily.”

He's served as an executive producer for the audio dramas, “1865,” “Terms,” “Dr. Death” among others.

He worked in SMU's marketing department for several years before he left for a job in the insurance industry. In 2015, he lost his job.

“It was fine with me,” he said. “Marketing in insurance was never really a dream of mine.”

His spouse was working full time, which allowed him to try the world of audio. He thought he would make some commercials. Some radio jingles. Scratch out an income that way.

This was around the time the podcast genre was growing, and he and a business partner shared a mutual interest.

They produced a political thriller called “Terms,” an audio drama that allowed Graham to use some of his friends in the Dallas theater community who provided the voices.

That production didn’t make him any money, but it did earn an award nomination. Which led to an introduction to Wondery, today one of the biggest podcast producers and platforms in the U.S.

In 2017, he returned to SMU for work. Later that summer, he was offered the chance to read an advertisement spot for a podcast produced by the Los Angeles Times.

He was then asked if he would like to produce a podcast about history.

“That’s not a question you say no to. You say yes,” he said. “(Wondery) wanted to replicate a podcast that was similar to the one on the fall of Rome; they wanted to do one on American history. It was a huge leap of faith to let me do it because I really had not done this before.”

At first, he produced the show himself. Historian Audra Wolfe wrote the script, which he would edit. He narrated the different voices. He composed the music.

Somehow, he makes it work.

The first season delved into the Cold War. The second season is on Prohibition. The most recent season is No. 46.

The former SMU marketing guy was so good at this genre he fell into it drew praise from Clooney.

During Clooney’s 2021 appearance on the podcast “Smartless,” with hosts Jason Bateman, Will Arnett and Sean Hayes, Clooney said he listens to podcasts when he goes to bed.

“I like history ones. I listen to, like ‘American History Tellers,’” Clooney said.

Graham heard about it shortly after the interview went live and ... nothing changed.

“I am not callous at all, but I see this as a dual mission,” he said. “The mission is to improve the world, and my bank account.”

He’s slightly tongue in cheek. Slightly.

He's dry, and endearingly modest.

He does want to better the world through history presented in a way that is entertaining. Enlightening. And somewhat easily comprehended.

When he produced the long series, "American Elections: Wicked Game," which details every single Presidential election campaign in America's history, there was a purpose.

The show was released after the volatile campaign between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton; at the time, pundits and observers routinely commented this was the "worst" campaign in U.S. history.

Listen to "Wicked Game," and you'll hear the similarities to most Presidential campaigns.

"I wanted to show the audience that every one of these elections has sucked," he said with some laughter in his voice.

Graham went on to start his own production company, Airship, and he works on four active shows.

Two of his shows, "American Scandal" and "American History Tellers," rank in the top 100 of all podcasts in the U.S.

The irony to all of this? He doesn't listen to podcasts.

He's too busy recording history.

Mac Engel is an award-winning columnist who has covered sports since the dawn of man; Cowboys, TCU, Stars, Rangers, Mavericks, etc. Olympics. Movies. Concerts. Books. He combines dry wit with 1st-person reporting to complement an annoying personality. — Mac Engel, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 817-390-7760. Part of the McClatchy Media Network.

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