

'Slaves in the Family' lecture presents painful truths

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Writer Edward Ball speaks frankly about his family's past as slave owners and the importance of remembering slavery. He spoke at the fifth annual Sylvia R. Frey Lecture on the Tulane University uptown campus. (Photo by Frank Aymami)

Writer Edward Ball's first words during a lecture titled, "Slaves in the Family — One Slave Dynasty and the Long Shadows of Southern Plantations," were that he is a descendent of slave owners dating back to the American Revolution.

"I heard a lot about the Balls, but little about the slaves," said Ball, who explained that the topic was not something his family discussed. "I grew up with an ignorance about my history and also an anxiety." He spoke on Monday (April 11) for the fifth

annual Sylvia R. Frey Lecture on the Tulane University uptown campus.

When his father gave him a book about his ancestors it started a chain of events culminating in his renowned historical account *Slaves in the Family*. The book his father gave him detailed a family of slave owners starting with Elias Ball, whose children and their children would rule over 4,000 people during their lifetime.

Ball became interested in this history. Through his writing and research, Ball not only discovered a wealth of information about the story of his family and the slaves they dominated, but that slavery remains a taboo subject.

“When I got to asking people what they knew about slave families, no one knew or wanted to know,” he said. “It scared people.”

He says there was backlash to his book because he dealt with a subject that is both shameful and painful for many. He concluded that “some don’t want to hear a white man tell the story of their ancestors.” But Ball has persevered in his research.

He ended his talk by reading a list of slave names — real people who’d lived and died in captivity. The goal was to remind his audience of the horror committed against so many people and the importance of valuing and protecting humanity.

Ball’s presentation was sponsored by the [New Orleans Center for the Gulf South](#) and [A Studio in the Woods](#).

Claire Davenport is a sophomore at Tulane University, majoring in English and political science.

“The stories families usually tell themselves are comforting. They ignore atrocities.”
Edward Ball, 2016 Sylvia R. Frey Lecturer