

Craig Yorke – Press Release Content

Brief Book Description

Steep, A Black Neurosurgeon's Journey, a memoir, traces an odyssey from a poor Boston neighborhood to a neurosurgical practice in Middle America. It's more about the price of success than the weight of bigotry – a story of resilience and self-discovery that will resonate with anyone who has wrestled with their past as they chased the American Dream.

News Release

Dr. Craig Yorke was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts. He received a BA from Harvard College in 1970 and an MD from Harvard Medical School in 1974. His parental directive insisted he avenge centuries of bigotry with a life of infinite success.

After a neurosurgical residency at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), he and his wife Mary found their way to Kansas, an unlikely destination. He practiced in Topeka for 25 years, wrestling with his history and the armored identity it had imposed. He and Mary raised two admirable boys, Zack who lives in Brooklyn and Chris who resides in Seattle. In retirement, Craig brews Mary coffee each morning in the colonial home they've occupied for 33 years. He's a credible violinist and hits tennis balls with passion. *Steep* is his first book.

Dr. Yorke felt the impulse to write *STEEP*, the title a reference to the steep obstacles he personally experienced, as he faced the Black Studies shelves in one of Topeka's local bookstores. He marveled at the indisputable truth and scholastic rigor in those themed books whose pages brimmed with courage, trauma, and righteous fury. Their diagnosis of America's racial illness was brilliant, he felt – the prognosis bleak. But he found little mention of remedy, no action prescribed – and wondered where his history could find shelf space.

"I felt dwarfed by the forces they described," Yorke comments, "powerless as any viewer of cable news. If these authors held the whole truth my life hadn't amounted to much."

STEEP initially began as a letter to his sons; his response to that bookstore moment. It isn't one more tale of winning against a stacked deck. It's a look at history's unspoken power through the lens of seven decades – at how the work of remembering can bring that power to light and soften its voice.

Yorke believes the past shapes us all and that many flavors of tribal identity shrink our lives today, immunize us against a wide world filled with sublime surprise. *Steep* tells of waking up, of inching toward a more fluid self, toward some friendship with that past -- and toward some space for the future.

About the cover art, a Purkinje Cell

These cells are among the most beautiful and easily recognized in the human brain, mimicking a minute oak tree. They were first revealed in the drawings of the Spanish neuroscientist, artist, and anatomist Ramón y Cajal in 1902, long before his microscopic images could be photographed. He and Camillo Golgi received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1906. About 15 million Purkinje cells live quietly in tight formation in our cerebellum, at the bottom of our brains, and work to inhibit excessive muscle tone.

They listen unceasingly to the world and our bodies through their thicket of millions of dendrites but speak only through a single transmitting axon. They keep our muscles balanced – neither too tight nor too loose, help us find our place in the world from one instant to the next.

Santiago Ramón y Cajal was a Spanish neuroscientist, pathologist, and histologist specializing in neuroanatomy and the central nervous system. He and Camillo Golgi received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1906.