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CHAPTER 17

Primary Source Instruction as a Social Justice Pathway

Erica Donniss and Faith Yacubian

Founded in 1878, Champlain College is a private college located in Burlington, Vermont, enrolling nearly 1,800 full-time traditional undergraduate students and 1,100 online undergraduate and graduate students.¹ Champlain offers career-focused academic programs, including graphic design and visual communication, game design, professional writing, criminal justice, computer and digital forensics, data analytics, education, and social work.² All traditional undergraduate students complete the college's interdisciplinary Core Curriculum, designed to facilitate critical and analytical thinking, inspire intellectual confidence for tackling complex social issues, and assist students in effectively communicating their personal values and beliefs.³

Primary source instruction is a significant component of Champlain College's Special Collections department, reaching more than thirty classes each academic year. Embedded within the Champlain College Library, Special Collections contains materials pertaining to the history of the institution and its environs, including the City of Burlington and the Lake Champlain region. The holdings consist of two major components: the Champlain College Archives and the Local History Collection. The archives contains administrative, faculty, and student papers, college publications, photographs, press clippings, oral histories, archived web content, and ephemera. The Local History Collection contains manuscripts, print publications, maps, business advertising materials, artifacts, and ephemera created by and/or about the local community.

This chapter describes three undergraduate instructional sessions that explored social justice topics related to local history, community memory-making, and the role institutions of higher education have played in both perpetuating and disrupting dominant cultural narratives. These sessions, which critically examined primary sources that were

predominantly produced by and for white community members, were developed and refined by the authors between 2019 and 2022. Erica Donnis, the former Special Collections director, delivered these lessons for three classes taught by Faith Yacubian, a former associate professor of interdisciplinary studies: two for the Core Curriculum and one for social work majors. This chapter highlights key sources featured in each session, lesson formats and classroom activities, pre- and post-session assignments, and instructor and student reflections.

The following glossary of definitions will create a common language as readers interpret the text in this chapter:

Inclusion	The act of representing people accurately and making alterations to correct historical and contemporary marginalization
Diversity	Human variedness within social identity groups and between social identity groups
Colonialism	The process of settling, extracting, or otherwise occupying land and/or a people to which one does not belong
Critical Race Theory	An analytical tool used to assess racism in institutions, such as education, the law, and healthcare, and examine the effect of racism as a cultural characteristic
The West	A set of beliefs, norms, and ideology that originated in Europe

Pedagogical Philosophy

The learning objectives for all three instructional sessions were directly linked to Champlain College's course learning outcomes and the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* developed by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the Rare Book and Manuscript Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).⁴ Moreover, the *Essential Understandings about American Indians* developed by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) for educators underpinned instructional content related to Indigenous peoples of North America.⁵

Acknowledging our own potential biases as instructors, as well as the inherent biases in higher education in general, was an essential component of planning and delivering these lessons. To that end, and while preparing for these sessions, we sought out sources such as oral histories, creation stories, and the websites of tribal nations in addition to secondary sources traditionally privileged by Western scholarship, such as journal articles. We included first-person accounts of those identifying with traditionally marginalized groups in the lessons to counter the representations conveyed in the primary sources. And in class, we strove to present ourselves as facilitators of the material rather than experts in the experiences and perspectives of others.

We also recognized that students would engage with the primary sources presented in these lessons in different ways depending on their identities, life experiences, and perspectives. During the years in which we collaborated on these sessions, about 20 percent of

Champlain College's traditional undergraduate students identified as American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian American, African American, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or multiracial. Classes averaged fourteen to eighteen students, and often only a small minority of students in each class identified as people of color. Seventy-five to 80 percent of undergraduate students hailed from outside Vermont and therefore had limited exposure to the history of the region prior to their arrival at the college.⁶

A foundational culture of respect in the classroom is essential to teaching social justice topics, particularly at predominantly white institutions like Champlain College. We used trauma-informed pedagogical strategies to create a safe space for students to view and analyze the items together. At the beginning of the semester, before their visit to Special Collections, students in Faith's classes developed shared expectations for how they would discuss difficult topics. These community norms foregrounded inclusion and anti-oppression as class values. By applying such norms to new learning spaces, including Special Collections, students experienced creating inclusive and respectful spaces beyond the familiar environment of their classroom.

The Special Collections lessons were grounded in student awareness, consent, and choice. Advance notification of the subject matter, the kinds of materials that would be presented, and the outline of the lesson ensured awareness before students arrived in class. When the sessions began, participants were given detailed content warnings about the sources they would encounter as well as the autonomy to decide for themselves which collections items they wished to view and the duration of their interaction with specific items. Students had the option to take short breaks from class after checking in with an instructor, and participation in oral discussions was voluntary. Anonymous exit surveys provided students the opportunity to freely respond, which gave the instructors a method of gauging the success of the lessons. To facilitate anonymity, the surveys were conducted with pencil and paper, and students left their responses in a tray near the classroom door rather than handing them to an instructor.

We took particular care in how materials containing terminology and/or imagery denigrating marginalized groups, such as racial slurs and caricatures, were presented. Specific content warnings were provided as part of an overview of these sources. Moreover, neither words nor images commonly understood to be offensive were presented on the classroom screen, and students were informed that while the presence of offensive language could be discussed, no one would be repeating the words themselves aloud.

Making Meaning Through Culture

In *Making Meaning Through Culture* (COR 203), a second-year Core class, students explore the concept of culture as a distinct phenomenon that shapes, and is shaped by, human experience. The Special Collections session was offered to Faith's students in the sixth week of the semester when they were exploring cultural text—the physical manifestation of culture—and applying the concept of epistemology to cultural meaning-making. Leading up to their visit to Special Collections, students explored the way cultural taxonomies imbue American dominant culture. For example: they read preselected chapters in

Isabel Wilkerson's text, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents*, and made inferences about the way taxonomies of hierarchy exist in the US caste system. The Special Collections session built upon the epistemological queries revolving culture and the markings of culture in everyday life and prepared students for a concentrated text analysis.⁷

The seventy-five-minute Special Collections lesson, "What's In A Name?," introduced students to the methodology of critically examining collections materials as cultural texts. Students used maps, tourist brochures, postcards, and local histories to investigate local Indigenous and white settler place names. First offered in spring 2022, the lesson focused on sources related to the lake that the Western Abenaki people know as *Bitawbagok* ("the lake between") and the white community calls Lake Champlain. "What's In A Name?" served as a case study of how naming relates to identity-making in many cultures, how place names assigned by white settlers are often a manifestation of Western cultural taxonomy, and how renaming has been used as both a tool of colonialist possession of the land and a method of erasing the presence and history of Indigenous peoples. This instructional session related to Learning Objective 4 of the SAA/ACRL-RBMS *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*, namely 4A: "Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source." Three core concepts of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)'s *Native Knowledge 360°* framework were also built into the lesson: "Essential Understanding 2: Time, Continuity, and Change," "Essential Understanding 3: People, Places & Environments," and "Essential Understanding 6: Power, Authority & Governance."⁸

Prior to class, students watched a short documentary film featuring traditional Western Abenaki creation stories about the region. The session opened with a description of the featured collections followed by thirty minutes for independent exploration of four groups of materials. The first group, a selection of maps and atlases published in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, illustrated the widespread replacement of Indigenous place names during the colonial period and the continued erasure of many Indigenous names. The second group consisted of nineteenth- and twentieth-century stereograph cards, postcards, advertising cards, and local histories featuring a small island in *Bitawbagok*/Lake Champlain known to the white community as Rock Dunder. None of these primary sources indicate that the island is the embodiment of *Odzihozo*, a spiritual being central to the Abenaki creation story, thus pointing to the overt erasure of both the place's Abenaki name and its cultural meaning.⁹

The third group consisted of local history publications about *Winoski*/Winooski, a site of Indigenous occupation dating to circa 3000 BC, located on the banks of the *Winoski*/Winooski River. Today, Winooski is a municipality of approximately 8,000 residents. White settlers arriving in the 1770s retained the Abenaki name for the river and settlement, *Winoski*, meaning "place of the wild onion." However, most of the local histories published since about Winooski have either completely omitted its historical ties to the Abenaki people and their continued presence in the area or relegated them to a brief section on "prehistory" in a colonialist assumption of history as beginning with white settlement.¹⁰

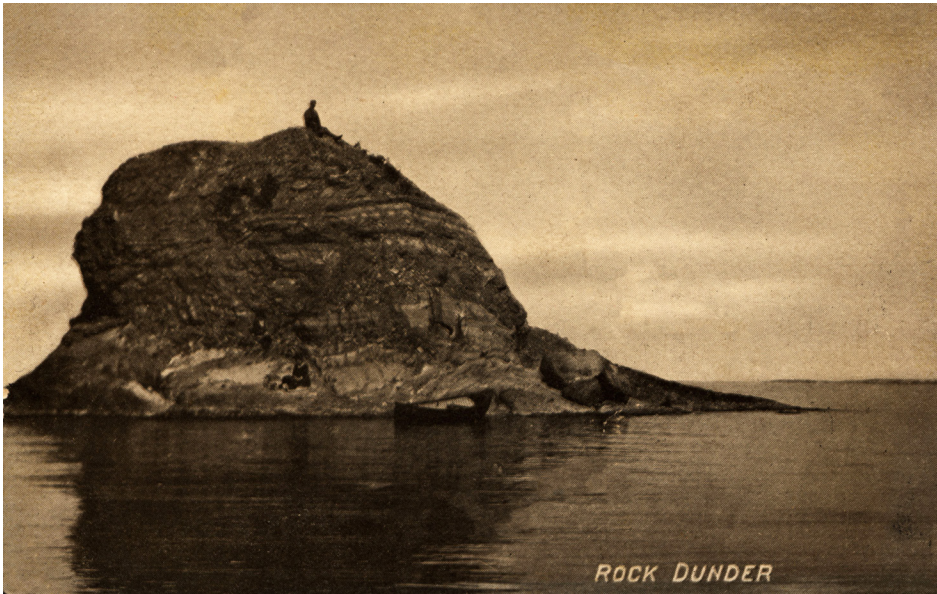


Figure 17.1. Rock Dunder, postcard published by Sheldon Ambertypes, 1909. Llewellyn Collection of Vermont History, 2010.1.1624. Maps, ephemera, and local histories published by members of the local white community typically feature the white name for this island, Rock Dunder, and omit both its Abenaki name, *Odzi-hozo*, and its significance as a central feature in the Abenaki creation story of the region.

Finally, students viewed ephemera commemorating French explorer and diplomat Samuel de Champlain (c.1567–1635)’s 1609 visit to the region. Champlain and a small party of French soldiers participated in a meeting of the Great Council Fire Alliance, a coalition of Indigenous nations, including the Wabanaki, Innu, Wendat/Huron, and Anicinape/Algonquin, at *Kebek* (meaning “the narrowing of the river”), a place later known to the white community as Quebec City, Canada. Champlain accepted the coalition’s invitation to form an alliance and join a war party traveling to the borderland region between their territory and that of their traditional enemies, the nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, including the Kanienkahagen/Mohawk, Onayotekaono/Oneida, Onundagaono/Onondaga, Guyohkohnyoh/Cayuga, and Onondowahgah/Seneca. The war party traveled west and then down *Bitawbagok*/Lake Champlain, and a battle occurred near *Tekontaroken* (meaning “a forked river”), a place later known to the white community as Ticonderoga, New York.¹¹ A selection of twentieth-century event programs, sheet music, postcards, souvenir objects, and advertising cards was used to illustrate Champlain’s renaming of *Bitawbagok*/Lake Champlain after himself and the subsequent historical narrative perpetuated in the white community that elevated Champlain to hero status for “discovering” the lake.

After their independent exploration, students formed small groups for a ten-minute conversation about one of the collections groupings using the following guided discussion questions:

- What do the place names used in these materials tell us about identity?

- What do the place names used in these materials tell us about cultural erasure?
- Whose version of history is depicted?

Each group then presented their observations to the class, sparking a broader discussion.

The lesson concluded with an anonymous exit survey based on a “Surprising-Interesting-Troubling” exercise.¹² Students were given five minutes to respond to two questions: “What resonated with you today?” and “Did anything you see fascinate, surprise, or even disgust you?” In spring 2023, one student reflected, “I was interested in identifying Burlington and other familiar locations on the maps. I was very interested in learning about the native culture and how their interactions with the settlers went. I left wanting to know more.” Another stated, “I don’t like the ways rich & powerful white people manipulate history.”¹³

Following their visit to Special Collections, students completed an assignment that explored naming and identity, reflecting on the roles cultural texts play in classifying or codifying cultural ideals, values, and beliefs. This assignment centered the methodology of textual analysis introduced in the Special Collections session by identifying the ways in which personal narrative conveys a particular story about culture. Students read *Conditional Citizen: On Belonging in America* by Laila Lalami. Lalami recounts her journey, traversing American values, beliefs, and attitudes upheld in the legal system, to becoming a US citizen.¹⁴ Students drew upon Lalami’s narrative to answer the question “What’s in a Name?” by identifying and describing two examples of the codification of culture in her story. Students also compared/contrasted Lalami’s story with their own by reflecting on the examples they chose and their own life experiences, including familial culture and history. Lastly, students discussed what personal narrative (cultural text) reveals about culture.

Colonialism

Students explored the mythology of Samuel de Champlain’s “discovery” of *Bitawbagok*/Lake Champlain in greater depth in an instructional session developed for a different second-year class: Colonialism (Core 280). In this course, students analyzed “The West” as a way of being, thinking, and knowing, and they learned to use inquiry as an interventional tool to observe the consequence of reading “The West” as innocuous, versus a mechanism of colonialism. While Colonialism was discontinued as a course in 2022, this Special Collections session was offered again in 2023 as an option for all sections of a new third-year Core class, Core Foundations: Connecting Past and Present (Core 303), which posits that being an active citizen in a global and emergent world entails close examination of the role that social expectations, dominance, and rhetoric play in narrating history and molding the present.

Leading up to the Special Collections session, Faith’s students engaged with Nigerian scholar, feminist, and writer Chimamanda Adichie’s Ted Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” to examine the semiotics of colonialism in Western rhetoric and representation.¹⁵ Students grappled with misrepresentation as a form and function of colonialism, which decenters Indigenous and Aboriginal self-descriptions and cultural knowledge, and

entered the Special Collections session with a sharpened lens and an aptitude for critically reading stories that claim accuracy in their representation.

The “Discovery” lesson used souvenir ephemera, tourist publications, and local history texts to illuminate the mythology of Samuel de Champlain’s 1609 voyage to *Bitawbagok*/ Lake Champlain, its recasting as a European-led exploration of uncharted territory, and the commemorative events held by members of the white community in subsequent years. Students then explored Champlain College’s use of the cultural narratives about Samuel de Champlain in shaping its own institutional identity. This lesson was rooted in three components of NMAI’s *Native Knowledge 360° Framework*:

- Essential Understanding 4: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions;
- Essential Understanding 6: Power, Authority, and Governance; and
- Essential Understanding 9: Global Connections.¹⁶

The lesson also related to two aspects of the SAA/ACRL/RBMS *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*:

- 4B: “Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source”; and
- 4D: “As part of the analysis of available resources, identify, interrogate, and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, or evidence of power relationships in the documentary record.”¹⁷

This seventy-five-minute lesson commenced with thirty minutes of independent exploration of collections materials. An overview of the historical context referenced in the primary sources was intentionally delayed until after this exploration, so students

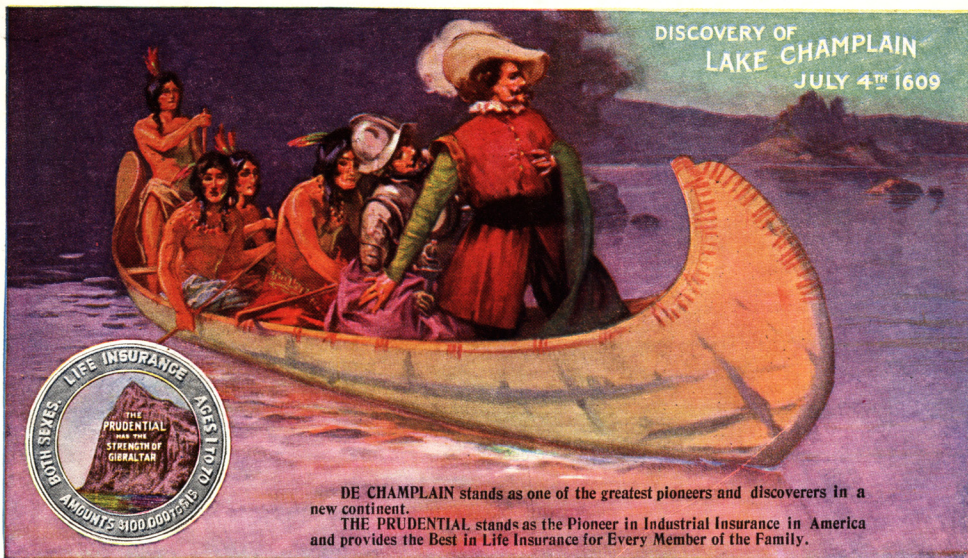


Figure 17.2. Advertising postcard titled “Discovery of Lake Champlain July 4th, 1609,” published by Prudential Insurance Company, 1909. Local History Collection, 2019.19.1.



Figure 17.3. The Samuel de Champlain statue on the Champlain College campus, sculpted by Jim Sardonis, 2009. The statue was installed during the 2009 Lake Champlain Quadricentennial, celebrating the 400th anniversary of Champlain’s visit to Lake Champlain. Photograph by Stephen Mease, 2013. Stephen Mease Papers, Series 012: Marketing, Champlain College Archives.

could focus on the messages and the biases present in the sources themselves. Students viewed event programs, postcards, advertising cards, sheet music, poetry, and souvenir objects published on milestone anniversary dates of Champlain’s 1609 voyage in 1909, 1959, and 2009. They also viewed images of the 2009 bronze statue on Champlain College’s campus depicting Samuel de Champlain, a press release announcing the unveiling of the statue, and memorabilia produced by the college from 2009 to 2022 that incorporates the spyglass featured on the statue.

Next, students spent ten minutes in small groups discussing the following questions:

- Who produced these items, and who consumed them?
- Using just these items (don’t do any additional research), what narrative can you construct about Champlain’s 1609 visit to Bitawbagok/Lake Champlain? What happened, and who was involved?
- Who is the hero of the story?
- What is the meaning of the Champlain statue on Champlain College’s campus? What does it symbolize?

Students then reconvened to view a ten-minute presentation providing deeper historical context and an introduction to the complex Indigenous perspectives about Champlain and his 1609 voyage to Lake Champlain. The class culminated with a reflection on the

origins and significance of Champlain College's own name and the statue of Samuel de Champlain, followed by an anonymous "Surprising-Interesting-Troubling" exit survey.

As a result of this lesson, many students drew conclusions about the broader implications of colonialism and the importance of centering the voices of peoples affected by it. As one student commented,

Colonizers must do the hard work of deconstructing colonial systems, but simultaneously they have to be collaborative and integrating with indigenous community members and leadership to the extent indigenous communities want/feel safe/demand, or it's just hungry-hungry hippos but the marbles are power and colonialism is the hippo, and in the end the colonizers keep the power.¹⁸

Following the Special Collections session, students applied their learning in an assignment called "The West as Identity." They drew from class content and sequential courses to describe "The West" as a particular culture with distinct characteristics and ideals, such as individualism, propertarianism, and modernity. The students were encouraged to apply the critical thinking skills flexed in the Special Collections session to discuss how "the West," as an identity, is symptomatic of colonial motivations.

Social Justice: From Oppression to Liberation

Social Justice: From Oppression to Liberation (SWK 305), a third-year Social Work class, explores the ways in which our lived experiences are shaped by social inequalities and social conditions such as education, laws, and social norms. Students examine how prejudice and/or oppression influence the level of struggle and/or ease with which they and others navigate the world.

At the start of the semester, leading up to their visit to Special Collections, Faith's students developed a sophisticated understanding of the multidimensionality of oppression and observed the way theory, such as Critical Race Theory, can be used to understand real-world phenomena. Offered in the third week of class, the 150-minute Special Collections lesson invited students to experiment with theory as an analytical tool for observing, assessing, and challenging racism in Vermont. The session used historic and contemporary ephemera, student newspapers, and college yearbooks to explore forms of explicit and implicit racism perpetuated by Champlain College's external and on-campus communities.

"Racism in Vermont" related to Learning Objective 4 of the SAA/ACRL/RBMS *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*, namely:

- 4B: "Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source";
- 4C: "Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and

culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection”; and

- 4D: “As part of the analysis of available resources, identify, interrogate, and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, or evidence of power relationships in the documentary record and how they impact the research process.”¹⁹

In the fall of 2020, mindful of the impact of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the heightened emotions of many of our students of color, we revisited the original lesson plan. We made a conscious decision not to present collections items containing the most egregious racist imagery in class. Instead, students were informed of their existence in Special Collections and invited to make an appointment to view them independently. Moreover, we integrated new acquisitions that highlight resistance against local racism and reference the experiences of students of color at Champlain College and student activism on campus.

Several steps were taken to prepare students for the Special Collections lesson. First, they read an excerpt from *The Most Costly Journey: Stories of Migrant Farmworkers in Vermont*, a graphic novel that presents first-person accounts of contemporary Latinx migrant laborers, to foreground the perspectives of some of those affected by racism in Vermont and foreshadow connections between past and present.²⁰ Then, a brief message was sent to students a few days in advance of the class via the course learning management system to provide an overview of the lesson and set the tone for what they could expect, and what would be expected of them, as they viewed and discussed the collections.

The Special Collections session opened with a recap of the class agenda, followed by a fifteen-minute anonymous reflection exercise designed to create a crowdsourced, student-led culture of respect, empathy, and self-care. Students were asked to respond to the following questions by writing their thoughts on scrap paper:

- What do you think about viewing racist content? Is it useful? In what ways?
- How can we support those among us who may be hurt by viewing these items?
- Is it worth the emotional pain viewing such items may cause, especially for the groups who may be targeted?

Students folded their papers in half and circulated their responses around the classroom, passing the papers among each other randomly so they were unaware of who wrote the reflection they ultimately received. A few students were asked to volunteer to read samples of the anonymous responses aloud to the class.

These student responses helped to establish classroom norms for viewing and responding to the sources predicated on a culture of empathy and support. Most felt that it was important to preserve and teach the content rather than ignoring its existence but that the manner in which it was presented was essential. As one student wrote, “All history is useful for informing our futures that, as long as the things are talked about in a sensitive way, we should most certainly look at them. They must be discussed in a space where everyone feels safe and welcome.” Students agreed on several strategies to support their classmates, including “Offer a safe space to talk about their feelings without judgment. LISTEN to their feelings and ACKNOWLEDGE them,” and “During the class, if any individual feels uncomfortable or pressured, they should feel free to opt-out of the discussion. . . . It’s more about individualistic choices.”²¹

The reflection exercise and subsequent discussion were especially important since some students voiced valid concerns that the content itself, and their classmates' reactions to it, could cause further harm to those who identified with the targeted groups. For example, one student stated, "I do not think it's worth the emotional pain.... Why add insult to injury?" Another pointed out that "Sharing traumatic or racist content is not just 'spreading awareness,' [sic] it actively contributes to the normalization of racist violence being consumed for entertainment."²² We addressed these concerns with the class, providing our rationale for presenting the lesson. We also reiterated that the items would be presented with content warnings, students could choose which of the items they viewed and how much time they spent with them, students could take a break from class after checking in with an instructor, and that participation in the discussion was optional.

Following the reflection exercise, students were given an overview of the five groups of ephemera assembled for the class, including detailed content warnings. They were then provided thirty minutes to independently explore the sources.

One group of ephemera contained references to Indigenous peoples. The items included souvenir postcards depicting Indigenous actors who participated in a 1909 reenactment of



Figure 17.4. Advertising postcard titled "The Cake Walk," published by the Estey Organ Company of Vermont, c. 1910. Llewellyn Collection of Vermont History, 2010.1.923. At first, this item seems innocuous to many students, who are unaware of the historical context of cake walk dances in which enslaved African Americans were compelled to perform for white spectators for a prize of cake. The dance form became a form of resistance in which enslaved people mocked the dances of their enslavers. The popular expressions "cake walk" and "piece of cake" arose from this dance form.

Samuel de Champlain's visit to the region; a 1935 recipe for "Indian pudding" produced by a cereal manufacturing company, which is accompanied by a stereotypical illustration of an Indigenous person; a 1934 marketing brochure for a boys' summer camp, which details the use of supposed local "Indian" rituals and totem poles in camp activities; and a 1953 score of sheet music that contains lyrics purporting to represent an Indigenous person's broken English.

Another grouping contained twentieth-century ephemera portraying African Americans, including advertising cards for local businesses, an event program for a minstrel show, and souvenir postcards. Also included were materials commemorating the "College Pee-rade" and "Kake Walk," events led by University of Vermont students in which participants wore blackface and performed choreographed "cake walk" dances, as well as an issue of a Champlain College student newspaper containing opinion pieces both supporting and denouncing the Kake Walk event.²³

The third group of ephemera consisted of contemporary materials related to the Black Lives Matter movement, including a handmade cardboard protest poster used in a local rally; the manifesto of The Black Perspective, a grassroots community group that held marches and gatherings in Burlington in 2020; and a t-shirt produced by Winooski Strong, an anti-racist nonprofit.

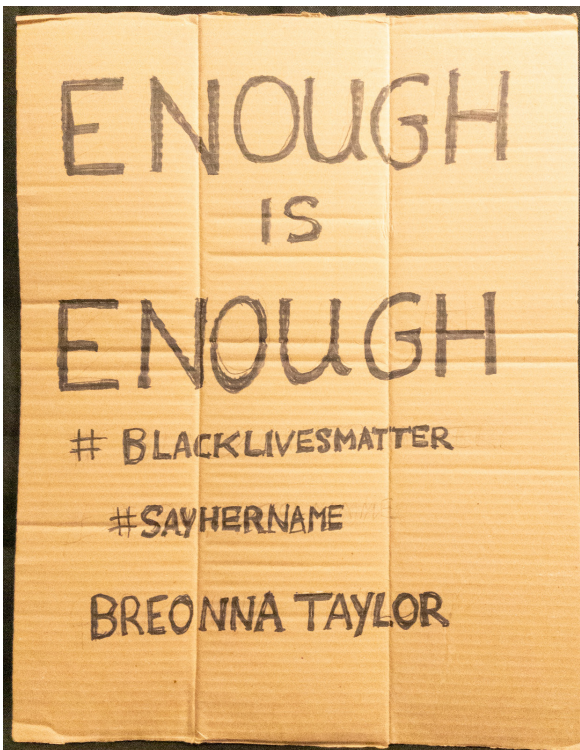


Figure 17.5. Anonymous protest poster titled "Enough Is Enough," produced in Burlington, Vermont, c. 2020. Local History Collection, 2022.171.

The last group of collections materials pertained to the experience of students of color at Champlain College. It contained student newspaper articles chronicling formal and informal diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on campus; the "List of Demands" presented at a 2018 student walk-out held to protest the treatment of students of color at Champlain College, images of the walkout, and the Champlain College President's communication to the campus community in reply to the walk-out; and an excerpt from a 2021 oral history interview narrated by an anonymous Asian American student about discrimination they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following their independent exploration, students responded to the materials they viewed with an exercise based on facinghistory.org's

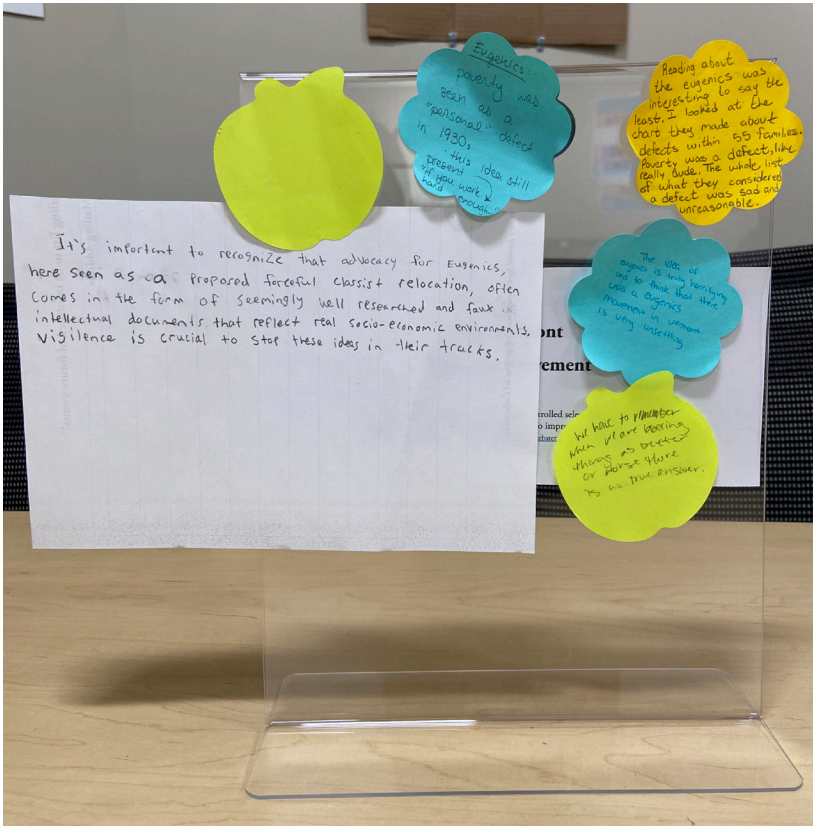


Figure 17.6. Student responses captured during a silent discussion exercise for a “Racism in Vermont” class session in September 2022. Photo by Erica Donniss.

“Big Paper: Building a Silent Conversation.”²⁴ Students wrote anonymous comments, questions, and reflections on scrap paper and sticky notes and circulated around the room to post their notes on the reading room tables and walls under thematic headings. Offering paper and sticky notes in a variety of sizes eased students’ apprehension about participating by giving them license to contribute a few words, a few sentences, or more. After students posted their initial thoughts, a silent discussion ensued, in which they responded to and built upon each other’s notes.

Among the contributions from students in a 2022 class session was this conversation about whether racist content should be archived and preserved. One student wrote,

I found many of the artifacts to be interesting ... to say the least. Thinking more about whether or not these artifacts should or should not be saved, my mind is starting to change. I think we have started to focus so much on preserving this history, but is it for the right reasons and is it necessary? I am starting to wonder. Are we saving these pieces to say, ‘Look how bad things were in the past, it’s so much better today.’ Are we using them to feel better about ourselves?

What are we able to save? What do we focus on saving and preserving over others? Are we doing this for the right reason? Is saving these artifacts allowing room for further change or is it simply giving us permission to feel comfortable in what we have done thus far and not prompting us to do anything differently?

Another student replied,

Thinking about what we save and what we don't is interesting. In the past, people have only saved things that make them look good. We still have a little bit of that today. Should we just save it all? Is that too much [sic]. Idk [I don't know].²⁵

After the silent discussion, students were invited, but not compelled, to share additional reflections and observations aloud. The discussion frequently became personal. For example, in one session, a white student related the examples of casual racism in the collections to an episode they witnessed in their majority-white hometown, while a student of color shared their experiences of subtle racism in Vermont and their need to code-switch to fit in on campus and in the local community. To conclude the lesson, students completed the “Surprising-Interesting-Troubling” anonymous exit survey.

After their Special Collections session, students integrated their learning into an assignment called “Racial Identity Exploration.” In this assignment, students reviewed Racial Identity Development models, such as Janet Helms’ White Racial Identity Development Model, and selected one that best reflected their race and/or ethnicity.²⁶ Tailored after the Special Collections reflection exercise, students reflected on questions that centered their racial lens and experiences and evaluated their racial development along a continuum. Then, students examined the way their racial lens observes, assesses, and makes meaning of daily acts (e.g., language and behavior) and systemic forms (e.g., employment and healthcare) of racism.

Conclusion

Reflective learning and teaching place the process of learning at the center of education. Similarly, critical reflexivity is a tool used in social justice efforts to ensure fidelity. Reflective thinking can be observed in frameworks of thought, such as feminism and anti-oppression, that have shaped the discourse of social justice. The Special Collections instructional sessions reflect such intentionality. From start to finish, each session provides trauma-informed practices that recognize the emotional and physical impact trauma can have on students’ experiences of learning. Students are offered opportunities to vocalize that impact and determine their own learning experience.

Although they address difficult topics, these instructional sessions had a positive effect on both students and instructors. Students appreciated having the opportunity to explore social justice content in a safe space. For example, one student noted the following in their exit survey after attending a “Racism in Vermont” class: “Grateful we have this and

can reflect.”²⁷ Moreover, a large majority affirmed the importance of teaching primary sources that document historic and contemporary social justice issues on campus and in the local community, as long as the items are presented with trauma-informed pedagogy that provides students autonomy in how they interact with the items and contribute to the discussion. As a student in a “Racism in Vermont” session reflected:

Those who examine history ... are equipped with a taste of the cumulative knowledge of the past. And more likely than not, that knowledge inspires an appreciation of intellectual collective truth, a rejection of prejudice, and trauma-informed thinking. It’s true that we must learn from our history so as not to repeat it. It is also true that it helps build a better future of people who have a willingness to think forwards. The pain and suffering as well as the points of light are critical for all to learn and be exposed to; especially if historical and cultural artifacts have the impact I think they do.²⁸

Developing and delivering these sessions had a significant ripple effect on other aspects of our work, including collections development, reparative description, and pedagogical practices used in other instructional sessions. Collections illuminating social justice topics at Champlain College and in the local community are now a priority for Special Collections acquisitions reflected in the Champlain College Library’s current strategic plan.²⁹ Catalog descriptions now indicate when Special Collections materials contain language and/or imagery commonly understood to be offensive. In order to avoid accidental discovery of painful content, cover illustrations featuring racialized imagery are disabled from view in the public-facing catalog with a note that they are available for viewing upon request. Additionally, verbal content warnings are provided to patrons and student employees when they interact with collections items known to contain potentially offensive material.

The active learning methodology in these sessions sought to make students autonomous participants in their learning and honor their whole selves within social systems of power, privilege, and oppression. It has reinforced our philosophy of education for all of the courses and lessons we teach, and we believe that the approaches we developed can serve as pedagogical strategies for many primary source instruction sessions, including classes that do not specifically focus on social justice topics. These strategies allow students to take an even more active role in their learning, contribute to local history and community memory-making, and, it is hoped, be better equipped to recognize, disrupt, and counter bias and prejudice in their personal and professional lives.

Appendix A

Sample Lesson Plan

Race and Racism in Vermont

Special Collections Instructional Session for *Social Justice: From Oppression to Liberation* (SWK 305)

Delivered in January 2022

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will

- consider holdings in Champlain College’s Special Collections, historic and contemporary—and archival materials in general—as examples of primary sources that can be used for research and analysis;
- consider how primary sources can contribute to and perpetuate cultural narratives, positive and negative, about people of different identities;
- consider how both the text and the imagery in primary sources can be used as vehicles for explicit and implicit racism;
- think critically about the importance of seemingly insignificant everyday items, such as postcards, t-shirts, and advertising materials, in creating and perpetuating cultural narratives; and
- draw broader connections between the cultural narratives about race in Vermont present in the specific primary sources on view with cultural narratives presented on campus, in Vermont, and beyond.

TIES TO THE SAA-ACRL/RBMS GUIDELINES FOR PRIMARY SOURCE LITERARY

- 4B: “Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source.”
- 4C: “Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection.”
- 4D: “As part of the analysis of available resources, identify, interrogate, and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, or evidence of power relationships in the documentary record and how they impact the research process.”

CLASS PREPARATION

Before arriving in class, students will

- read at least two chapters of their choice from Marek Bennett, Julia Grand Ducet, Theresa Mares, and Andy Kolovos, eds., *The Most Costly Journey: Stories of Migrant*

Farmworkers in Vermont, Drawn by New England Cartoonists (Middlebury, VT: Open Door Clinic, 2021) (this publication is on reserve in the Library); and

- receive a message via Canvas, the learning management system, approximately three days before class, as follows:

Hi, I'm Erica Donniss, the Special Collections Director at Champlain College. I'm looking forward to seeing you for your class session in Special Collections. We'll be discussing race and racism in Vermont through the lens of historic and contemporary materials. You will have the opportunity to look at publications, postcards, sheet music, and other items that illustrate both blatant and subtle racial bias through text and images.

Some of these items may be difficult for you to see and think about, and it's important to acknowledge that. Our class will be structured to support you as you explore them. We will start our session with a reflection about how we can take care of ourselves and others while viewing and discussing these materials. Then you will be given time to review them on your own. The collections will be grouped thematically. You will be given a heads-up about what is in each group, and you can choose what to look at and engage with. Participation in the discussion will be voluntary.

I am looking forward to exploring these items with you and learning from you as we discuss them together. See you soon.

LESSON AGENDA FOR 150-MINUTE CLASS

9:00–9:10 a.m.:	Welcome and get settled; housekeeping and class announcements
9:10–9:25 a.m.:	Independent anonymous self-reflection exercise
9:25–9:35 a.m.:	Distribute and independently review anonymous reflections
9:35–9:50 a.m.:	Class discussion about reflection exercise and establishment of trauma-informed classroom norms
9:50–10:00 a.m.:	Overview of collection groupings and specific content warnings
10:00–10:40 a.m.:	Independent exploration of collections
10:40–11:00 a.m.:	Silent discussion using scrap paper and sticky notes based on facing-history.org 's "Big Paper: Building A Silent Conversation" model
11:00–11:30 a.m.:	Whole class oral discussion (voluntary participation)

ANONYMOUS SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISE

Students will complete the following questions using provided scrap paper and pencils:

- What do you think about viewing racist content? Is it useful? In what ways?
- How can we support those among us who may be hurt by viewing these items?
- Is it worth the emotional pain viewing such items may cause, especially for the groups who may be targeted?

COLLECTIONS GROUPINGS

1. Depictions of Indigenous Vermonters, featuring postcards, advertising materials, brochures, and sheet music
2. Depictions of African Americans, featuring postcards, an advertising card, event program, college yearbook, and newspaper editorials

3. Local materials related to the Black Lives Matter movement, including a protest poster, published manifesto of The Black Perspective, and Winooski Strong t-shirt
4. Content about the experiences of students of color at Champlain College, including student newspaper articles, materials related to the 2018 student walkout, and a transcript of a student oral history

WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Egregious vs. subtle—who decides? Some of you may find that at least some of the sources you viewed today “aren’t that bad.” Some of you may think they’re all despicable. Who gets to decide—or does anyone?
- Now that you have viewed today’s primary sources, have you changed your mind about whether Champlain College should be preserving them and whether they should be presented in class?
- Are the cultural narratives present in these primary sources unique to Vermont? Maybe you have an example like this from your hometown or something currently under debate in contemporary American culture (such as sports team names, school mascots, Confederate monuments, and/or current politicians photographed wearing blackface in the past).
- Can we do anything to correct and shape our collective memory going forward? Do we have that responsibility as individuals, and/or as a community?

SUPPLIES

- Pencils
- Full sheet scrap paper (of same or similar appearance to ensure anonymity) for self-reflection exercise
- Full and half sheet scrap paper and sticky notes for silent discussion exercise
- Easel paper for silent discussion exercise

Notes

1. “Champlain College 2023-2024 Fact Book,” Champlain College, January 2024, 6.
2. “Champlain College Fact Book,” Champlain College, 36–43.
3. “Core Curriculum,” Champlain College, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.champlain.edu/academics/academic-divisions/core-curriculum>.
4. “Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy,” SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (JTF-PSL), Society of American Archivists, last modified June 2018, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForPrimarySourceLiteracy-June2018.pdf>.
5. “Native Knowledge 360: Framework for Essential Understandings about American Indians,” National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/pdf/NMAI-Essential-Understandings.pdf>. We acknowledge the guidance of Vera Longtoe Sheehan, a member of the Elnu Abenaki, executive director of the Vermont Abenaki Artist Association, and a former educator at the National Museum of the American Indian, for introducing the NMAI framework to us.
6. “Champlain College 2021-2022 Fact Book,” Champlain College, January 2022; “Champlain College 2022-2023 Fact Book,” Champlain College, January 2023.
7. Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).

8. "Native Knowledge 360," National Museum of the American Indian, 4–5, 8.
9. Vince Franke, *The Odzihozo and Champ Story* (Waterbury, VT: Peregrine Productions, 2019), 12:11, from Abenaki Arts and Education Center, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://abenaki-edu.org/the-odzihozo-and-champ-story/>; Colin G. Calloway, *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration and the Survival of an Indian People* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 14; Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.
10. We credit the scholarship of Jean O'Brien for inspiring this component of the lesson; Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). The local histories presented were: Blondin, Al and Anastasia Platt, *Winooski* (Winooski, VT: Winooski Historical Society and Arcadia Publishing, 2015); Lillian Baker Carlisle, ed., *Look Around Winooski, Vermont* (Burlington, VT: Chittenden County Historical Society, 1972); Laura Krawitt, ed., *The Mills at Winooski Falls: Winooski and Burlington, Vermont, Illustrated Essays and Oral Histories* (Winooski, VT: Onion River Press, 2000); and Marjory W. Power and James B. Petersen, *Seasons of Prehistory: 4000 Years at the Winooski Site* (Montpelier, VT: Vermont Division of Historic Preservation, 1984).
11. "The League of Nations," Haudenosaunee Confederacy, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/the-league-of-nations/>; Karonhi:io Delaronde and Jordan Engel, "Haudenosaunee Country in Mohawk," The Decolonial Atlas, accessed September 25, 2023, <https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2015/02/04/haudenosaunee-country-in-mohawk-2/>; Frederick Wiseman, *At Lake Between: The Great Council Fire and the European Discovery of Lake Champlain* (Ferrisburgh, VT: Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, 2009); David Hackett Fisher, *Champlain's Dream: The European Founding of North America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 258–70.
12. "S-I-T: Surprising-Interesting-Troubling," Facing History & Ourselves, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/s-i-t-surprising-interesting-troubling>.
13. Champlain College students, anonymous exit survey responses to "What's in a Name" Special Collections Session, February 23, 2023.
14. Laila Lalami, *Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2021).
15. Chimananda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," filmed at the July 2009 at TedGlobal, video, 18:33, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/.
16. "Native Knowledge 360," National Museum of the American Indian, 6, 8, 11.
17. "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy," SAA-ACRL/RBMS, 5–6.
18. Champlain College student, anonymous exit survey response to "Samuel de Champlain" Special Collections Session, February 8, 2021.
19. This lesson was first piloted for a 75-minute first-year class, COR 120: Concepts of Community, taught by former Champlain College faculty member Liz Allen-Pennebaker in Spring 2019. Allen-Pennebaker created the first version of the student reflection exercise, and we are grateful for her guidance. The following semester, the session was expanded and refined for SWK 305, a 150-minute class taught by Faith Yacubian. SAA-ACRL/RBMS, "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy," 5-6.
20. Marek Bennett, Julia Grand Ducet, Theresa Mares, and Andy Kolovos, eds., *The Most Costly Journey: Stories of Migrant Farmworkers in Vermont, Drawn by New England Cartoonists* (Middlebury, VT: Open Door Clinic, 2021).
21. Champlain College students, anonymous introductory reflection exercise responses for "Racism in Vermont" Special Collections Session, September 18, 2020.
22. Champlain College students, anonymous introductory reflection exercise responses.
23. James Loewen, "Black Image in White Vermont: The Origin, Meaning, and Abolition of Kake Walk," in *The University of Vermont: The First Two Hundred Years*, ed. Robert V. Daniels (Hanover, NH: University of Vermont/ University Press of New England, 1991).
24. "Big Paper: Building A Silent Conversation," [facinghistory.org](https://www.facinghistory.org), accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/big-paper-building-silent-conversation>.
25. Champlain College students, anonymous exit survey responses to "Racism in Vermont" Special Collections Session, September 15, 2022.
26. Janet E. Helms, ed., *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research and Practice* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).

27. Champlain College student, anonymous exit survey response to “Racism in Vermont” Special Collections Session, September 15, 2022.
28. Champlain College student, anonymous exit survey response.
29. Champlain College Library, *Champlain College Library Strategic Plan 2022-2026*, Goal 5.3, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://subjectguides.champlain.edu/libstrategicplan>.

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