



The Power of Erasure: Reflections on Civil War, Race, and Growing Up White in Vermont

*History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.*
Maya Angelou¹

BY ELISE A. GUYETTE

I was six years old, standing with my rolled up towel on the steep grassy hill sloping down to the Rutland swimming pool, when I witnessed something for the first time. A boy called a girl “nigger.” Infuriated, she turned on him and beat him up. The first thing going through my young mind was amazement that a girl could beat up a boy. Then I confronted the racial prejudice that was staring me in the face. That word. We used it to order the little chocolate baby candies at the sweet shack. I had used it. I didn’t know there was anything wrong with it. I don’t know what lesson that boy learned, but I stopped using the word— more out of fear of being beaten up than with an understanding of why the word had stung and enraged that young girl.

But she had opened my mind and I started thinking about color. I asked why there weren’t more black people in Vermont. I always received similar faulty answers: Many people escaping slavery came through the state, helped by Vermonters seeking justice and equality for all, but al-

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most none of them stayed. They went to Canada. Oh... I wondered why they didn't stay if Vermont was such a righteous state.²

I did, however, see black faces on the stages of my Catholic elementary and high schools. Always needing to raise money to stay in business, the schools held minstrel shows every year. They were wildly popular. The interlocutor in his sparkling white suit ran the show, and the six black-faced "end men" told jokes and strutted across the stage like the dim-witted Sambo character created in the eighteenth century.³ I couldn't wait to be old enough to be in the show and I finally participated in high school. I mindlessly helped to keep those racist images alive in the minds of many people.

I could go on about the ubiquitous racist language and images that surrounded me while growing up in Vermont, including Kake Walk at UVM (1893-1969), which I attended as a student, and the grinning, servile artifacts of black people in the Toy Shop at the Shelburne Museum, where I once worked.⁴

These popular events and racist artifacts were direct descendents of those created in the nineteenth century during reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the Civil War. The North was flooded with these types of dehumanizing images that erased real images of blacks fighting for their human rights, depictions that frightened many whites. They became more important in the North than in the South, where terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow laws controlled the actions of blacks and whites alike.⁵ In the North, racist images in popular culture influenced the minds of white people and affected their behavior: whom they played with, whom they saw as smart, whom they hired, rented, or sold to; whom they served in restaurants, arrested and imprisoned, or otherwise interacted with. People of color often internalized the stereotypical images and negative attitudes of white society.

Unfortunately, these racist images created during Reconstruction are still with us. Recently, someone was thoughtlessly selling an ashtray with racist imagery at a ga-



Figure 1. An ashtray offered for sale at a garage sale in Colchester, Vt., August 29, 2015. Photograph by Vicki Garrison. Used with permission of the photographer.

rage sale in Colchester. A Vermont resale shop recently had for sale the sheet music for Mary Irwin's "Bully Song."⁶ Any woman, man, or child coming upon this ugly stereotype today could also have read these lyrics:

Have yo' heard about dat bully dat's just come to town?
 He's round among de n.....s, a-layin' their bodies down.
 I'm a-lookin' for dat bully and he must be found.
 I'm a Tennessee n.....r and I don't allow
 No red-eyed river roustabout with me to raise a row.
 I'm lookin' for dat bully and I'll make him bow.⁷

Perhaps the sellers were unaware that coming upon something like this while shopping is traumatizing for people of color, as well as to whites who are sensitive to such racist imagery. Perhaps they didn't realize that their actions are tantamount to spreading the virus of racism. They may not have intended their actions to be racist, but intent isn't a requirement for racism. Those images created long ago still poison the minds of many Vermonters, who internalize, often unknowingly, the idea of white superiority.

Just as images such as these can be powerful tools to implant racist ideas, those representing a different narrative, such as photos of Civil War sharpshooters at the Library of Congress, can combat stereotyping and racism. But how many heroic representations of black Vermonters do we have to counteract the racist images of powerlessness, brutality, and servility in our minds? An absence of positive images can be just as debilitating as being bombarded with hurtful ones. That absence is keenly felt in Vermont.



There are about 80 statues and monuments in Vermont that commemorate the sacrifices of our Civil War military. One in Coventry lists the four Mero brothers who fought in the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Infantry Regiment. A historic sign in Hinesburg mentions the four men from Lincoln Hill who fought in the Massachusetts 54th and South Caro-

Figure 2. Sheet music cover page, "May Irwin's 'Bully Song'" (1896). Words and music by Charles E. Trevathan; illustration by Davenport. Photograph courtesy of Amy Burrell.



Figure 3. “Dutch Gap, Virginia. Picket station of Colored troops near Dutch Gap canal, Nov. 1864.” Digital file from original glass plate negative, right half of a stereographic pair. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

lina 33rd United States Colored Infantry Regiment, USCT.⁸ These two account for less than 3 percent of our monuments that honor heroes of the war. There is no statue of a black soldier in the state. In reality, 150 black Vermonters, composing 20 percent of all people of color in the state, came from every corner of the state and many walks of life to serve. They fought and died during the Wilderness Campaign, at Olustee, Honey Hill, and Boykin’s Mill, in the sieges of Charleston and Petersburg, and they pursued Lee’s Army to Appomattox Court House, to give just a few examples.⁹ However, my classmates and I never learned about these African American heroes in our history classes.

In 1892, the *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers and Lists of Vermonters Who Served in the Army and Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion, 1861-66* stated that “Four Vermonters commissioned as officers in the Colored Troops were brevetted for gallant and meritorious services in the field.” But few of us learn about the heroism of black soldiers or their white officers. Where are their statues? Vermont’s heroes also include those keeping things together on the

home front, such as the young woman from St. Albans, name unknown, who sat for her portrait at a photography studio. Many women kept farms and businesses going, while supporting the soldiers by sending them food and homemade items. This history has been omitted from our texts and our landscape.¹⁰ Unfortunately, that omission causes many of us to see only white when we think of people who sacrificed their lives or well-being during the war. If we think of blacks at all, it is as enslaved people or nameless numbers following the white troops for protection. This erasure of black heroism is a legacy of the war that must be corrected if we are to eradicate the poison of prejudice from our minds.



Figure 4. Photograph of an unidentified woman. Smith photograph studio, St. Albans. No date. Courtesy of the author.

Eleanor Jones Harvey discussed the “power of erasure” at the 2014 Vermont Humanities Council conference, “A Fire Never Extinguished: How the Civil War Continues to Shape Civic and Cultural Life in America.”¹¹ Erasing the images of real black people fighting for an end to slavery, allowed the ideology of black inferiority to continue to flourish in our literature and art, on the landscape, and in our minds. This ideology, a legacy of our Revolutionary War era that enveloped enslaved people, also infringed upon the freedom of free blacks in this country, who were closely linked with slavery in the minds of most whites.¹² Vermont was no exception. Even antislavery advocates believed in the so-called “scientific” racism of the time that proclaimed, “Blacks and whites had unlike blood, indicating different origins (and) different qualities.”¹³ The socially constructed fabrication of *blackness* became synonymous with forced servitude and gradually came to mean dependent, weak, unintelligent, not worthy of citizenship, history-less.¹⁴ The invention of *whiteness* slowly developed in reaction to blackness and as its polar opposite: free, civilized, virile, autonomous, powerful, worthy of citizenship, makers of history.¹⁵ Even black heroism in the war could not combat these powerful ideas,

especially because we inadequately neutralize these false narratives with real ones.

Our history textbooks fare no better. The most important legacy of the war was enshrined during the Reconstruction years (1861-77)¹⁶ with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to our U.S. Constitution. These amendments changed the original Constitution, which was a slaveholders' document, to one that finally ended slavery, ensured black citizenship, and guaranteed freedom and justice for all people. However, the history of those who courageously entered the Reconstruction fight to guarantee that blacks could exercise these rights has also been largely erased from popular memory, media, and texts. Eric Foner, our country's foremost historian of Reconstruction, maintains that as long as "citizenship, rights, and democracy remain contested, so will the necessity of an accurate understanding of Reconstruction. More than most historical subjects, how we think about this era truly matters, for it forces us to think about what kind of society we wish America to be."¹⁷

However, the losers of the American Civil War manipulated how people think about this era and controlled a significant portion of the stories told about the war and its aftermath, creating a simplistic and mythological story to redeem themselves in the eyes of the world. After the rise of black leadership during Reconstruction, Southern whites began promoting the view that white "saviors," former Confederates, were needed to save the South from black "misrule." James Loewen, a former professor at the University of Vermont, recently wrote that the Confederacy "won with the pen (and the noose) what they could not win on the battlefield: the cause of white supremacy and the dominant understanding of what the war was all about. We are still digging ourselves out from under the misinformation they spread."¹⁸ The Confederate 'redeemer' fiction has allowed us to disregard agonizing realities and has contributed significantly to the painful and complex effects of Civil War and Reconstruction on current race relations.

The Southern narrative of the war and Reconstruction still has currency in Vermont, too. We are still struggling to dig ourselves out from under not only that narrative but also a mountain of half-truths and hidden histories of slavery and racism in the state.¹⁹ We need to continue this struggle by telling real stories of real people from the Civil War to the present. This history matters to us today.

Unfortunately, the false idea that Reconstruction was a failure caused by ignorant blacks, who did not know what to do with freedom, does nothing to help us face our painful history. It does nothing to help white people think differently about people of color. The idea of black inferiority has become so deeply ingrained in our culture that to many peo-

ple it does not seem like an idea at all but simply the natural order of things.²⁰ As David Blight made clear at the Humanities Council conference, the popular memory, right or wrong, is a “sacred possession” that is difficult to discard.²¹ It is also, and perhaps more significantly, difficult to challenge.

Challenges to the sacred myths of a racism-free and black-less Vermont are just as difficult to mount. Stories of Vermonters who participated in Reconstruction can help explode those dangerous myths, but we do not find them in our history curricula. Their stories, and others like them, deserve a place in our public schools, where Reconstruction history is often glossed over in favor of jumping from the North’s winning of the war to the so-called Progressive Era. Eric Foner bemoans this omission:

Wherever I talk about this [Reconstruction], there are plenty of people—and not just the older ones—who say, “All I know about Reconstruction is corruption, carpetbaggers.” The main thing is that people know next to nothing about Reconstruction. And what they do know is just not correct. I mean, just basic myths, [like] the idea that all the blacks in office were illiterate and ignorant, also a total myth—we could go on about this but the point is, there are still a lot of misconceptions.²²

Two Vermont examples to help us break down the misconceptions are Martha Johnson (1822-1871), a white teacher from Peacham, and Loudon²³ S. Langley (1838-1881) a black soldier from Huntington who became a lawyer. Both were eyewitnesses and activists during the Reconstruction era. Both were native Vermonters and both are buried in Beaufort, South Carolina. They were well acquainted with the perils of fighting for justice and equality in the South.

Johnson’s description of her work belies the Southern narrative of blacks as naturally unfit for citizenship: “The [adults] come in after a hard days work to read a few verses and then go home and read it over again by their pitch pine fires until they can read it quite well. They seem so grateful for a little instruction it is a pleasure to teach them. The children are quick to learn as white children and as full of fun and mischief.”²⁴ Two years later, she still felt positively about her students: “The children are bright and eager to learn. It is a pleasure to teach them. I enjoy this work more and more.”²⁵ Stories of “bright and eager” formerly enslaved students seldom reach our classrooms.

Before he fought in the Civil War, Langley wrote forceful letters from Huntington, Vermont, condemning “the most unjust prejudice against all the men of our race” that he and his extended family had encountered in northern Vermont.²⁶ In 1863, Langley enrolled in the Massachusetts 54th Regiment and later transferred to the South Caro-

lina 33rd, USCT. He mustered out in South Carolina and moved there permanently with his wife, Jane Anthony from Burlington, and their children. As with Johnson, Langley's story undermines the Southern narrative of blacks as unfit for democracy. He studied for the bar, became a lawyer, and was one of the more than 1,000 capable black men who served in public offices in the South during Reconstruction. In fact, he was one of the founding fathers of radical republicanism in South Carolina during the postwar period.²⁷ He competently represented Beaufort at the 1868 South Carolina Constitutional Convention to rewrite the constitution to include all blacks as citizens, as the new amendments to the U.S. Constitution mandated. We know that Langley was "loud-mouthed about justice and equality" during the convention.²⁸ With his input, the new South Carolina constitution went further than any other state to "provide freedmen with land and encourage the breakup of the plantation system."²⁹ With the help of Vermonters like Johnson and Langley, the model to equitably reconstruct the South had been built. The North just had to seize it and replicate it throughout the South. But Northerners had no stomach for it.

By the 1870s, Northern industrialists, including those in Vermont, were turning their gaze from rebuilding the South to commerce and labor issues in order to bolster capitalism and enhance profits. This meant dealing with Southern farmers and industrialists. Therefore, elites from the North and South made peace with each other. In Vermont, for example, the Winooski Mill (later the Burlington Cotton Mill) and the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington flourished with southern cotton and immigrant labor. There were no people of color working in these mills; however, southern blacks were forced to pick cotton under brutal circumstances to supply them.³⁰ As Frederick Douglass said, liberty and justice for blacks was doomed from "the hour that the loyal north began to shake hands over the bloody chasm."³¹ Political cartoonist Thomas Nast used this figure of speech in his attack on Horace Greeley, once apprenticed to a printer in Vermont, in the 1872 presidential election campaign.

Federal census data show that people of color in Vermont, who had made gains in the labor market, eventually lost ground to people with lighter skin.³² By 1870, the U.S. census figures show that Vermont blacks were being relegated to only the most menial positions as servants, day laborers, and laundresses; yet even those jobs were in jeopardy. Irish and French Canadian migrants flowing into the state became competition for blacks and elbowed them out of many service and laboring jobs. Apparently, Vermonters hired those "whose hunger and whose color are thought to give him better title."³³

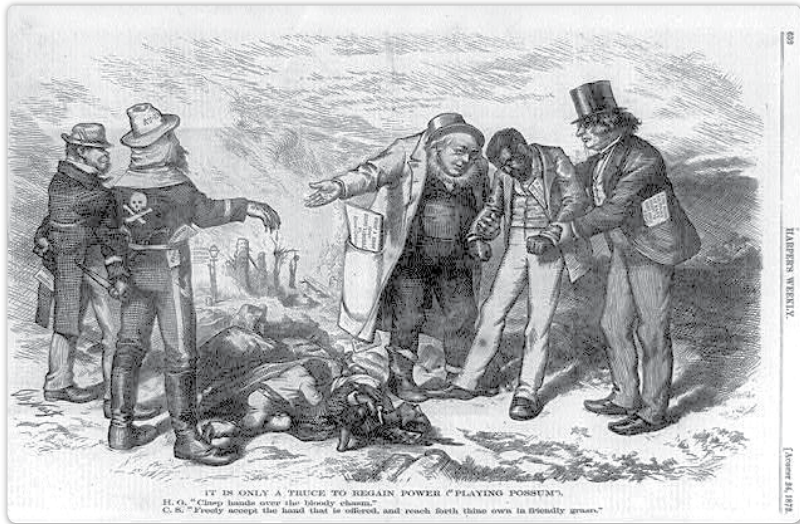


Figure 5. Thomas Nast, “It is only a truce to regain power (‘playing possum’).” Wood engraving, published in *Harper’s Weekly*, August 21, 1872. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

The failure of the North to continue rebuilding the destroyed South in the name of justice and equality led to unthinkable terror for Southern blacks and left Northerners complicit in the decades of horror that ensued.³⁴ By the early twentieth century, a person of color was being lynched and sometimes burned every four days in the South.³⁵ However, the North averted its gaze and left the South to its own devices. New so-called “scientific” data, such as longer arm measurements of black soldiers, were interpreted by whites as yet another sign of black inferiority, despite their bravery in the war and political leadership afterwards. No matter how successful black abolitionists, politicians, teachers, and soldiers were, whites fought against that history being written. Historian Mia Bay claims that blacks’ ensuing “intellectual resistance to racism’s relentless ideological assault was in many ways as historic and difficult as the protest actions against slavery.”³⁶

Historian Drew Gilpin Faust asks for the “reinsertion of race into national discourse.” She contends that putting these issues “of race and inequality front and center in the American present, means putting them front and center in the American past as well.”³⁷ But we are not facing them in Vermont, where our past is mythologized and many believe we have no racial problems. In fact, our racialized past still haunts us. My research on a black community in Hinesburg revealed that de-

scendants of those early pioneers, who included Revolutionary War veterans, had hidden the fact that they had black ancestors. They did it to protect their children from the socially constructed ideas of *blackness*. They wanted their descendants to claim the powerful veil of *whiteness* that would bestow upon them many privileges in our society. If Vermont has no racial problems, they would not have felt the need to hide their ancestry into the twenty-first century.

Vermont's continuing racial dilemmas and ways Vermonters have dealt with them have filled books and myriad reports. In 1957, a Burlington event opened many eyes to racism in Vermont. Leroy Williams Jr., a black UVM student, tried to reserve a hotel room for his out-of-town girlfriend. The motel on Williston Road explained to him that there was an understanding "among hotel operators to take no Negroes."³⁸ The UVM student newspaper started the call for a civil rights bill, and the legislature passed a public accommodations bill that year. However, Mayfair Park in South Burlington legally held onto the codicil in its deeds saying that no one would sell homes to blacks.

In 1965, Governor Philip Hoff proposed a bill to prohibit racial discrimination in housing sales and rentals. It failed. However, in 1967 the bill was back in the legislature where it passed with an amendment providing for a Vermont Human Rights Commission to investigate complaints but with no authority to levy fines or other penalties. The commission had no office and no money, which left it unproductive and weak, although many people tried to keep it alive.

That same decade, South Burlington High School (where my children went to school) was established. Pictures from old yearbooks clearly show that the students and faculty had chosen a Confederate nickname, the *Rebels*, the Confederate flag as their symbol, and a Confederate Colonel as their mascot. Their colors were, and still are, blue and grey. When they chose Confederate icons, they unthinkingly and insensitively chose symbols that represented the nation's enemies, who had started a war that killed 750,000 Americans to keep people enslaved and, later, who foisted a new reign of terror on blacks who dared to fight for a better life. The students and their supervisors were surrounded by racism but they could not see it because they and their families could rent at any hotel, buy a home anywhere in the city, and read the history of their people every day in school. While the students were choosing the Confederate flag as their symbol, people of color who tried to register to vote were being lynched in the South under that same hateful banner. To choose such symbols was institutional racism, pure and simple. Intent is not needed for racism to occur.³⁹

To be a racist, according to modern popular thought, is to be a violent

monster. While there certainly are violent racists who hate people of color, there are also very nice people, with no animosity toward blacks, who unconsciously buttress a cruel system. The people who chose these symbols may not have been personally prejudiced, but they had the power to choose symbols that damage people's psyches, then and now.⁴⁰

In 1968, after the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (known as the Kerner Commission after its chair, Governor Otto Kerner Jr. of Illinois) exposed "persistent and underlying racism in American society," Governor Hoff continued his efforts to end racism in Vermont. His administration believed that familiarity between white Vermonters and people of color would help build interracial harmony. He and New York City Mayor John Lindsay started the NY-VT Summer Youth Project to bring black teenagers to Vermont for six weeks in the summer. "Criticism ranged from skepticism and mild disapproval to virulently racist hostility."⁴¹ An anonymous poem to Hoff stated in part:

But he and Lindsay overlook one trifle,
Every Vermont farmer owns a 30-30 rifle.⁴²

The poem was an eerie foreshadowing. That same year a shooting event took place in Irasburg. In the dark of the night, a white man named Larry Conley fired shots into the home of the Rev. David Lee Johnson, a black clergyman, and his family. Rev. Johnson returned fire and then gave cover to his son, who ran next door to call the police. The police quickly identified the shooter from Glover, who had harassed black students of the NY-VT Youth Project two weeks previously, but did not arrest him. Meanwhile, the investigation of the crime inexplicably turned into an examination of Johnson's life and character. Newspapers all over the state joined in as investigators crisscrossed the country to dig up dirt on the reverend. Although they were not successful in finding any incriminating evidence, the police arrested Johnson on adultery, a charge almost never used in Vermont, and in this case never substantiated. After investigators spent 2,256 hours and traveled 20,943 miles prosecuting the case, all charges were dropped, and the Johnsons left the state.⁴³ Many people suffered, except the real perpetrator. The police eventually charged 21-year-old Larry Conley with breach of the peace, instead of assault to kill, which the Vermont attorney general had advised. Conley received a suspended six-month sentence and a fine of \$500, all wrapped up a little over a month after the shooting.

Some people blamed Gov. Hoff for bringing blacks from New York into the state and stirring up racial tensions. He received much hate

mail after that, and later claimed that the events of that summer of 1968 were a major factor in his losing his bid for election to the U.S. Senate in 1970.⁴⁴

Vermont never led the country in conquering racism as Hoff had hoped. Twenty years later, Governor Madeleine Kunin revived the Vermont Human Rights Commission (VHRC) after a 1986 report of the Vermont Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights again pinpointed Vermont's problems with racism and discrimination.⁴⁵ The VHRC was reborn in statute with more teeth to investigate problems, enforce non-discrimination laws, and create policy. Both of these groups have collected data on prejudice and discrimination in Vermont.

A 1999 report from the Vermont Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded, "Racial harassment is widespread and pervasive in and around the State's public schools and is a reflection of overall race relations in the State where racial slurs, epithets, and physical assaults occur daily. . . . Minority students experience fear in attending schools and are reluctant to participate in school activities, adversely affecting their academic performance."⁴⁶ People who testified before the Advisory Committee that year made the connection between our history curriculum and racism. One parent explained,

Schools need to be very proactive with regard to racial issues. I think that anybody involved with the school, including the parents, needs to think about whose history is being taught in the school, what images the child sees, and what are the stories that are interwoven into every aspect of the curriculum."⁴⁷

Another spoke about the very real relationship between history curriculum and racial harassment: "Teachers need education about the connection between curriculum and harassment in the hallways and on playgrounds."⁴⁸

The Committee had two fears about what would happen to students once they left school. First, they felt that white students would maintain their "racial stereotypes and may perpetuate harmful attitudes towards minorities and feelings of animosity to others in the community." Second, they feared that students who experienced racial harassment would have "negative self-esteem, lowered self-confidence, and a sense of estrangement." They understood that these problems are a symptom of the racism of the larger Vermont community. "As in many other States, racism has permeated into the very fabric of Vermont life, undermining residents' ability to contribute to the productivity and stability of the State."⁴⁹

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, reports continue to document Vermont's institutional racism, not only in schools, but also at traffic stops, in housing, and in employment. In 2009, testimony before the Vermont Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights (VACCR) told the story of an African American graduate student living in Vermont for a year.⁵⁰ On his first day here, he was stopped twice while driving. During his year in residence, he was stopped thirteen times by the police. He was never found to be violating any law. He was never arrested. He never even received a ticket. Research from 2010 showed that, "in Burlington, the share of black drivers subject to an investigatory stop is approximately 85% higher than whites" and the penalties for black drivers "are between 9-14% heavier on average" than for white drivers.⁵¹ New 2016 research shows that, rather than improving over time, the problem is getting worse.⁵²

Reports of discrimination in housing abound. In 2014, testers working for Vermont Legal Aid (VLA) tried to rent apartments. They found preferential treatment toward whites 36 percent of the time. No one was overtly discriminating. It was subtle. But black testers did not secure housing as readily as white testers, and the blacks were less likely to be told about other area units that were available. As a result, the VLA concluded that discrimination in housing "poses significant barriers to equal housing opportunity for African American renters."⁵³

In 2014, Sheila Linton, a native of Brattleboro and an organizer with the Vermont Workers Center, was named by *Glamour* magazine as one of the "50 Phenomenal Women of the Year who are Making a Difference." She said that she lives to fight for justice and create social change in her community. And yet, she lives with the feeling she doesn't belong because she is often perceived as an outsider simply because of her color. She says that she "stands in the face of fear" in her hometown: Fear of continuing racism and fear that her children will be treated the way she was in school. Linton said she got her "ass kicked every day at school" for being "that little black girl."⁵⁴ Unfortunately, documented scenes like that continue today in large and small communities throughout the state.⁵⁵

In addition to Vermont's four active hate groups⁵⁶, a recent study on the geographic origins of online hate speech by Dr. Monica Stephens of Humboldt State University (HSU), shows that Vermont has a very heavy use of hate speech on Twitter. Because the software being used in the analysis automatically classified any tweet containing 'hate words' as negative, the project had HSU students read all the identified tweets to discover those that were truly negative.⁵⁷ Vermont is squarely in the red zone, which shows very heavy usage of hate speech related to various groups of people. We are in serious danger in Vermont when it comes to

issues of race. We need to face them courageously, teach about them, and correct our trajectory if we are truly to become a state of justice and equality.

On a more hopeful note, Vermont has long participated in the Fresh Air Fund, which goes back to 1877. It originally had one mission only: to help children hit by a tuberculosis epidemic in the tenements of New York City enjoy the climate of northern states. People at the time believed that “fresh air” could cure respiratory ailments. Today the organization brings over 200 children living in low-income communities in New York City to Vermont each summer. The program was created to save inner city children, but the program also helped to save me. The girl who beat up the boy at the Rutland swimming pool many years ago was part of the Fresh Air program. She awoke something in me that I didn’t understand as a child, but she opened my eyes for the first time to the racist system into which we were all born. Many white people spend a lifetime unaware of the biases they carry. As a first step in eliminating racism, communities might hold trainings led by educators who are able to help people “unpack” their unconscious stereotypes.⁵⁸

In addition, we need to write a different history, unaffected by Confederate myths. We need to include all the courageous men and women who have been fighting for hundreds of years, first to end slavery, and later to end the racist system it engendered. To end this long era of white supremacy and racism, we need a new honest history of how we got here and imaginative ideas about how to change the direction of our society. Vermont is small enough to become an experimental state where we might eventually lead the nation in conquering systemic racism.

Lois Brown cautioned us at the 2014 Vermont Humanities Council conference that the “act of looking back” carries the possibility of loss.⁵⁹ Yes, but one thing we can lose is the false narrative. We lose the myth of whites as better people. We lose our blinders. But we gain a more complete, complex, and accurate historical narrative. One that includes all people carries the possibility of freeing us from our racist past and a present that still looks at color as a designation of inferiority. Brown also said that looking back honestly is “a call to be brave,” to ask difficult questions, to dismantle myths. We have been avoiding issues of race in the North and particularly in Vermont for a very long time. It’s past time for us to understand our real history and the “culture-wide stampeded spirit” engendered by our myths that burden people of color.⁶⁰ It’s past time for us to stand up to the purveyors of painful fabrications and together build a more accurate history that brings back the forgotten heroes and disregarded stories of our fight against racism and for justice and equality for all people.

NOTES

¹ Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning" (1993). Online: <http://poetry.eserver.org/angelou.html>.

² Decades later, I proved these stories wrong with research for my history MA, "Black Lives and White Racism in Vermont, 1760-1870" (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1992) and for *Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790-1890* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2010).

³ This ubiquitous image was from a play by John Murdock in 1795, "The Triumph of Love," first shown on a Philadelphia stage.

⁴ For more information on Kake Walk, see 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, N.H. / University of Vermont: University Press of New England, 1991).

Electra Havemeyer Webb, who started the Shelburne Museum, was the daughter of H. O. Havemeyer, the "Sugar King." He made his money by the labor of enslaved people in the Caribbean sugar cane industry. Electra used some of this fortune to start the museum.

⁵ William L. Van Deburg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). The Klan also had presence in Vermont. See, for example, Maudean Neill, *Fiery Crosses in the Green Mountains: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan in Vermont* (Randolph Center, Vt: Greenhills Books, 1989); "The K.K.K. in Vermont through 1927," <http://vermonthistory.org/research/research-resources-online/green-mountain-chronicles/the-k-k-k-in-vermont-1924>; "When the Night Sky Glowed with Hate," <http://www.northlandjournal.com/good-reads-from-the-northeast-kingdom/new-page>; and most recently, "KKK recruitment fliers lead to hate crime charges, arrest," <http://www.wptz.com/news/vermont-prosecutor-police-to-talk-of-kkk-recruitment-fliers/36407166>.

⁶ These two images are from the Facebook page "Vermont Racism—Real Talk" and used with permission. Ashtray courtesy Vicki Garrison. Sheet music courtesy Amy Burrell.

⁷ In vaudeville, "coon songs" flourished and white women became the favored singers and were called "coon shouters." Foremost among the coon shouters was May Irwin. Her performance of the Charles Trevathan hit, *The Bully Song* (1896) was influential in establishing the stereotype of the razor-toting, jealously belligerent black male." <http://parlorsongs.com/insearch/coonsongs/coonsongs.php>.

⁸ This regiment was originally the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry. It was unofficially formed in February 1862 and was composed of men escaping slavery in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. They were attached to the Union forces at Port Royal Island, South Carolina. In January 1863, they were officially re-formed immediately following the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation at the old Smith Plantation on Port Royal. This made them the first USCT (United States Colored Troops) unit in the country. After the federal government took over the raising of black troops in 1864, because of competition among northern states for black recruits, they became the 33rd South Carolina. Their officers were white.

The historical marker in Hinesburg was recently stolen and vandalized. It was later found, refurbished, and returned to its rightful spot on the landscape.

⁹ See <http://Vermontcivilwar.org/units/afam/> for more details.

¹⁰ I once asked a state official why there were no statues to black Civil War soldiers in Vermont. He answered that they couldn't figure out in what town to place one. No one would have that problem with white soldiers—every town where white soldiers came from has a monument. Why not every town from which black soldiers came?

¹¹ "Why Art Matters in Understanding the Civil War," at "A Fire Never Extinguished: How the Civil War Continues to Shape Civic and Cultural Life in America," Vermont Humanities Council conference, Burlington, Vermont, November 13-14, 2014.

¹² See Guyette, "The Limits of Republican Citizenship," http://www.flowofhistory.org/themes/american_republic/limits.php.

¹³ J. Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 153. See also Bruce R. Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); James Brewer Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Native peoples were seen as somewhere in between: free and virile but also savage and history-less.

¹⁵ For people of color, negative stereotypes of whiteness grew in reaction to their treatment by whites, and included characteristics such as hypocritical, brutish, violent, destructive, unjust, aggressive, domineering, immoral, and avaricious. Positive stereotypes of people of color included gentle, peaceful, long-suffering, moral, religious, pious, benevolent, and affectionate. See Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Robert Paynter, "The Cult of Whiteness in Western New England," in *Race and the Archaeology of Identity*, ed. Charles E. Orser Jr. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001).

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¹⁶ Texts often give other dates. However, Reconstruction started in Port Royal, S.C., after the Union victory there November 7, 1861. The plantation owners fled and the army freed thousands. By the next year many Northern teachers, black and white, prepared to travel south to educate the freedmen. In 1862, Laura Towne opened the Penn School, the first Reconstruction school, on St. Helena Island, S.C., with many more to follow. In addition, the National Park Service, taking a wider view and looking for a place to establish a Reconstruction Park, is looking at sites dating from 1861, when enslaved people began fleeing to Union encampments, until 1898, when Jim Crow laws were fully in place throughout the South. See Jennifer Schuessler, "Taking Another Look at the Reconstruction Era," in *New York Times*, 24 August 2015. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/25/arts/park-service-project-would-address-the-reconstruction-era.html?emc=edit_th_20150825&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=56726126.

¹⁷ Eric Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters," *New York Times Sunday Review*, 28 March 2015, 5. Online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/opinion/sunday/why-reconstruction-matters.html?rref=opinion>. One missed opportunity to learn about Reconstruction came with Ken Burns's beautiful-looking documentary of the Civil War. He ended it with the famous handshake between former white Confederate and white Union soldiers as the whole country settled into the southern narrative created to ensure a supply of cheap labor and black disenfranchisement. But Burns totally ignored the reign of terror enacted against the newly freed people during the years between the end of the war and that handshake.

¹⁸ James W. Loewen, "A Critique of Textbook and Mainstream Media Coverage of the Civil War," *The Washington Post*, 1 July 2015.

¹⁹ For more accurate information, see Amani Whitfield, *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont, 1777-1810* (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2014), and Guyette, *Discovering Black Vermont*.

²⁰ "The supposed horrors of Reconstruction were invoked as far away as South Africa and Australia to demonstrate the necessity of excluding nonwhite peoples from political rights. This is why W.E.B. Du Bois, in his great 1935 work *Black Reconstruction in America*, saw the end of Reconstruction as a tragedy for democracy, not just in the United States but around the globe." Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters," 5.

²¹ David Blight, "The Civil War in American Memory at 150: Legacies in Our Own Time," "A Fire Never Extinguished," 14 November 2014.

²² Eric Foner interview in *Salon*, 20 August 2015. Online: http://www.salon.com/2015/08/20/people_know_next_to_nothing_about_reconstruction_the_pernicious_civil_war_revisionism_poisoning_american_history_students_partner/.

²³ Langley's name is variously spelled Lowdon, Loudon, Loudon, and Loudin. In South Carolina, a misreading of the cursive on primary documents caused his name to become Landon or London in the South. In his writings, he generally used L. S. Langley. In his military enlistment record and in a letter to the editor in which he used his given name, he spelled it Loudon, so I use that spelling.

²⁴ Martha Johnson to her sisters, Perryclear Plantation [Beaufort, S.C.], 25 April 1863, from Johnson Family of Peacham, Vt., Papers 1854-1904. Vermont Historical Society, MSA 185. Online: <http://Vermonthistory.org/documents/transcriptions/johnsonletters.pdf>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1865.

²⁶ Letters of Loudon (sic) S. Langley Before and During the Civil War, 27 April 1854. Online: <http://Vermontcivilwar.org/units/afam/ll.php>.

²⁷ Thomas Holt, *Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

²⁸ "Proceedings of the 1868 Constitutional Convention of South Carolina," *Making of America Books*. Online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;cc=moa;rgn=main;view=text;idno=AEW7613.0001.001.374>.

²⁹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 329.

³⁰ For more on neo-slavery in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Southern states, see Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). He describes how Southerners created a system of forced labor that mirrored slavery in many ways, except one: The lives of the men ensnared in this system were cheaper than in slavery. Companies did not pay for the laborers; they got them free from the prisons. If laborers died, businesses would simply put out a call to arrest more black men for petty actions like walking too close to a railroad track.

³¹ David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 95.

³² Elise A. Guyette, "The Working Lives of African Vermonters in Census and Literature, 1790-1870," *Vermont History* 61 (1993): 69-84.

³³ E. J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 184-185.

³⁴ See Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*.

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³⁵ Isabel Wilkerson. "When Will the North Face Its Racism?" *New York Times Sunday Review*, 10 January 2015. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/opinion/sunday/when-will-the-north-face-its-racism.html?smid=fb-share&_r=0. Today, police somewhere in this country kill a black person twice a week.

³⁶ Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 229.

³⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, "Telling War Stories: Reflections of a Civil War Historian," National Endowment for the Humanities 2011 Jefferson lecture. Online: <http://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/drew-gilpin-faust-lecture>.

³⁸ Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash. *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2004), 536.

³⁹ Adapted from my 2015 letter to *The Other Paper* in South Burlington.

⁴⁰ Recently, the school had discussions about getting rid of the last vestige of that time, the 'Rebel' name. The school decided to keep it despite the arguments by students and citizens that it represented a reprehensible era in our country's history.

⁴¹ Michael Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 541.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 542.

⁴³ Numbers are from Mark Bushnell, "Compacency Shattered like Glass," *Barre-Montpelier Times Argus*, 28 September 2008.

⁴⁴ Michael Sherman et al, *Freedom and Unity*, 543; Samuel B. Hand, Anthony Marro, and Stephen C. Terry, *Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State* (Castleton, Vt. and Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2011), 147.

⁴⁵ The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the U.S. Civil Rights Division, which "works to uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all Americans, particularly some of the most vulnerable members of our society." Online: <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/>. The Vermont Advisory Committee takes testimony on various issues chosen by officials in Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶ Vermont Human Rights Commission, "Report on Racial Harassment in Vermont Schools" (1999), 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 91, 92.

⁵⁰ The testimony is online at <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/VTRacialProfiling.pdf>.

⁵¹ This was true, even once they controlled for "other factors that may influence the outcome of a stop." Stephanie Sequino and Nancy Brooks, "Racial Disparities in Policing? An Assessment of 2009-10 Traffic Stop Data in Chittenden County, Vermont," 30 March 2012, 2-3.

⁵² A new report by Sequino and Brooks shows that "Blacks and Hispanics have a higher probability of being arrested and searched, and a lower probably of being found with contraband, once searched." The probability of blacks being stopped and searched is 4.6 times that for white drivers around the state. Hispanic drivers are searched 4 times more than white drivers. There are substantial racial disparities in policing depending on the town; the search rate of black drivers is 6 times greater than white drivers in Brattleboro and Rutland. "Analysis of traffic stops and outcomes in Vermont shows racial disparities," 1 July 2016, online at

<http://phys.org/news/2016-07-analysis-traffic-outcomes-vermont-racial.html>.

⁵³ This finding also applies to people with children and those with disabilities. "Rental Discrimination Report Housing Discrimination in Vermont Rental Markets," Vermont Legal Aid, May 2014. Online: <http://www.vtlegalaid.org/rental-discrimination-report-2014>.

⁵⁴ Olga Peters. "Hundreds of Thousands Standing by Her," *The Commons*, 285 (17 December 2014), A1. Online: <http://www.commonnews.org/site/site05/story.php?articulo=11304&page=1#.VJndEMAAM0>.

⁵⁵ Annual human rights reports specifically mention incidents in varied places all over Vermont, such as Morrisville, Castleton, Fair Haven, Rutland, Brattleboro, and Swanton. Many are in Chittenden County, where numerous studies have been done because of the comparatively large numbers of people of color.

⁵⁶ See the "hate map" created by the Southern Poverty Law Center at <http://www.splcenter.org/hate-map#s=VT>.

⁵⁷ To see the "hate map" created by the project, visit http://users.humboldt.edu/mstephens/hate/hate_map.html#.

⁵⁸ Sequino and Brooks, "Racial Disparities in Policing?" 36.

⁵⁹ Lois Brown, "Cultivating Civility and Accounting for Race: American Culture in the Aftermath of the War Between the States," at "A Fire Never Extinguished," 14 November 2014.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Carroll, "Calling Out One Racist Doesn't Make White People any Less Complicit in Supremacy," *The Guardian*, 17 March 2015. Online: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/17/calling-out-one-racist-white-people-complicit-supremacy>.