

Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing

Editor-in-Chief Noelle A. Baker

ISSN: 2167-1257 | DOI: [10.55520/6ZH06EW2](https://doi.org/10.55520/6ZH06EW2)

Volume 42, 2025-06-11, DOI: [10.55520/49RSWHQY](https://doi.org/10.55520/49RSWHQY)

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Teaching Tolerance and Empathy through Digital Documentary Editing

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DOI: [10.55520/TE5ENQ51](https://doi.org/10.55520/TE5ENQ51)

Introduction

This essay considers digital editing as a space in which students can engage with matters of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality when teaching on such topics is scrutinized or prohibited. I examine how digital editing can be deployed to allow students to explore histories that cannot be included in course syllabi or addressed in direct ways in the classroom. I argue that digital editing can serve as a tool for teaching tolerance and empathy in contexts in which matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been politicized and where speech that runs afoul of the law can have professional consequences for faculty.¹

The editorial practice on which this paper reflects has involved archival texts related to local history. In this sense, the type of editing discussed most closely adheres to the practice known as *documentary editing*, as described, for instance, in the seminal work *A Guide to Documentary Editing* by Mary-Jo Kline and Susan Holbrook Purdue.² The ideas expressed here, however, could apply to the edition of other types of texts.

In a similar fashion, I focus on editing with students in a digital context. I believe that digital documentary editing, and the online publication of the results, offers students the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful and immediate fashion to real scholarship in a way that may be less commonly available with more traditional print projects. Much of what is contemplated here, however, could apply to nondigital endeavors.

Scholarly Context

This article builds upon the work of other scholars who have considered digital editing as a tool for teaching. Amanda Gailey, for instance, examined how digital editing can help students to improve their skills at reading and writing.³ Camden Burd described a model for creating “a platform for undergraduates to contribute to a grant-funded and collaborative digital documentary-editing project,” the Seward Family Digital Archive, arguing that “[t]he incorporation of TEI and XML coding into the classroom allows students to engage with course material and share their research in innovative ways.”⁴ Most recently, John Bryant, Mary Isbell, Christopher Ohge, and Mary Erica Zimmer shared four case studies demonstrating ways that digital editing provides a framework for experiential and student-directed learning.⁵

Like these authors, I argue for digital editing as a pedagogical approach, but I focus specifically on the use of editing to enable students to engage with topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this sense, the ideas in this essay intersect with scholarship addressing the ethics of editorial and archival practice, as well as work considering notions of empathy in those fields. While these have not historically been primary objects of study in either editorial theory or archival studies, editors and archivists have increasingly considered such topics in recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in 2020, events which focused the attention of scholars, the media, and the public on inequalities in US society. In the case of both editors and archivists, such scholarship examines not only how we understand the objects with which we work but also how such understanding can shape our practice.

In 2021 Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O’Neill, and Holly A. Smith coedited a special issue of the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* titled “Radical Empathy in Archival Practice.”⁶ Inspired by a 2016 article by Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor,⁷ that collection examines how embracing theoretical frameworks focused on compassion could result in “more liberatory archives.” As Arroyo-Ramírez and her coeditors explain, “[r]adical empathy and feminist ethics of care cause us to think beyond simply understanding how an individual or community feels; they compel us to commit to just actions and to fundamentally shift our interactions and understandings.” They note the importance of such approaches for archives professionals working with collections related to populations impacted by injustice: “This becomes particularly important for historically marginalized and oppressed communities, who have frequently experienced harm via cultural heritage institutions, through everything from ‘benign’ neglect to intentional erasure.”⁸

The volume *Editing Early Modern Women*, coordinated by Sarah C. E. Ross and Paul Salzman, features several essays that reference empathy as a component of editorial practice, particularly in the context of publishing texts by early modern women writers.⁹ Susan M. Felch, in particular, points to the need for editors of those writings to engage in “a critical but empathetic interrogation of both our own scholarly practices and the texts we are editing.”¹⁰ She describes the role of editors as “custodians of the backward gaze,” countering the tendency to approach writings through the theoretical paradigms of the present, and encouraging engagement with those texts on their own terms.¹¹ By deploying such “editorial empathy,” as she terms it, Felch suggests that editors can contribute to “the task of revising and clarifying critical assumptions.”¹²

This approach involves understanding that “editorial work is relentlessly and necessarily local,” as Felch puts it, and that general interpretive frameworks can seldom accommodate the complex individuality of texts and the contexts in which they are written.¹³ Ramona Wray, for instance, examines the way that editions of Elizabeth Cary’s early seventeenth-century play *The Tragedy of Mariam* “have had a narrowing effect, positioning the play as only ‘women’s writing’ or ‘biographical adjunct’ and downplaying the significances of a text that is actually implicated in a much broader range of contemporary dramatic activity.”¹⁴

Like Felch, Wray argues that editors must be willing to understand a piece of writing as an autonomous object rather than evidence of any predetermined interpretive stance. Summarizing Felch’s idea in the context of her own scholarship, Wray affirms that, instead of pursuing editorial approaches that “push the reader towards particular contexts for reading Cary’s play,” editors are better advised to work in “a mode of ‘editorial empathy’ that demonstrates the importance of locating women’s texts in precise historical contexts rather than within the broad generalization of ‘women’s writing.’”¹⁵

In a chapter in the 2022 volume *Victorian Culture and Experiential Learning*, Janice Schroeder, Barbara Leckie, and Jenna M. Herdman examine empathy as a component in their approach to creating an abridged teaching version of Henry Mayhew’s unfinished *London Labour and the London Poor*. The authors frame their work in the context of “historical empathy,” which they point to having originated with E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*.¹⁶ They assert that, from an editorial perspective, such empathy involves not only understanding texts from the past but also questioning their omissions. Schroeder, Leckie, and Herdman argue that “historical empathy cannot be only about bringing to life the past, [. . .] but also about recognizing the myriad unacknowledged ways in which the past continues to bear on present lives.” As they explain, “[i]t is one thing [. . .] to encourage historical empathy and quite another to attend to what remains unsaid and unarticulated and to ask why those omissions persist.”¹⁷

These are merely three recent examples, among many others that could be identified, of archivists and editors considering the ethical implications of their work. These studies demonstrate how questions about the ways we treat each other are central to archival and editorial practice, even if they have not traditionally been recognized as such. In each example, scholars in those fields are thinking about empathy as a means not only to gain insight but also to break with established, often harmful practices.

The current study relates to such work by considering the notion of empathy, and by extension, that of tolerance, in the context of conducting digital documentary editing projects with students. It positions documentary editing as an activity that is inseparable from ethical concerns related to how we understand the writings of others and how we transmit them to audiences today. This essay, however, does not focus primarily on empathy as a route to more ethical editorial practice. Instead, I propose something that, in a sense, moves in the opposite direction: editorial work as a means for promoting empathy. Focusing specifically on the context of undergraduate education, I examine editing as a tool for encouraging appreciation for the lives of others and understanding the effects that social and economic forces have in shaping the experiences of individuals and groups.

Political Context

This essay also responds to the current situation in Florida. In recent years we have seen the normalization of political discourses that position educators as subversive and morally deficient, portray immigrants as criminals, and deny the existence of structural inequalities in our society. Until recently considered a “swing state” in national elections, Florida’s political landscape has shifted in a dramatic fashion that has left many residents of the state confused, disheartened, and afraid.

Among the many ways this new reality has expressed itself is through legislation targeting higher education. The most far-reaching example, Senate Bill (SB) 266, imposed new limitations on academic freedom, prohibiting institutions in the State University System (SUS) from spending funds on “programs or campus activities that [. . .] advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion; or promote or engage in political or social activism.”¹⁸ SB 266 essentially swept away the legislative and Board of Governors mandates that until recently required K–12 systems and institutions of higher learning to ensure nondiscrimination and equality of access.

The stark changes in higher education in the state are illustrated by two official communications from the University of North Florida (UNF). The first is the UNF’s “2021 Florida Equity Act Report,” a fifty-eight-page document that details how the university sought to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in nearly every aspect of student and academic life on campus.¹⁹ The second is an email to the campus community from the university’s president, Moez Limayem, in January 2024. Following the passing of regulation 9.016 by the Florida Board of Governors, which stipulated how universities in the State University System should comply with SB 266,²⁰ Limayem announced officially the closure of several offices on campus, all of which figure prominently in the aforementioned report from 2021: “In accordance with the new law and the approval of this regulation, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and its centers (the Intercultural Center, Interfaith Center, LGBTQ Center and Women’s Center) will now begin to be phased out.”²¹

Although the most visible impacts of regulation 9.016 so far have been the elimination of positions and offices related to diversity and inclusion, the real consequences on campuses are more pervasive. SB 266 gives the Board of Governors broad latitude to scrutinize other aspects of an institution’s operations, including academic programs and their curricula. In stipulating that the Board of Governors carry out a periodic review of each institution’s curriculum, the law states: “The board shall include in its review a directive to each constituent university regarding its programs for any curriculum that violates s.1000.05 or that is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities.”²²

In this environment, faculty fear retribution for speaking out, particularly those in more vulnerable disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.²³ Tenured faculty lack immunity, as SB 266 also mandated that each institution implement a post-tenure review policy—something that once seemed like a radical revision of the understanding between universities and their faculty but is now being carried out across the state as an increasingly normalized bureaucratic procedure.²⁴ The first round of post-tenure reviews in 2023–2024, furthermore, demonstrated that the process is not merely another administrative formality, having real and potentially devastating impacts on professors’ careers.²⁵

The threat to faculty extends beyond that presented by the post-tenure review to more immediate mechanisms for surveillance and punishment. In 2021, for instance, the State of Florida passed HB 233, a law that grants permission to students to record, without consent, professors they think have run afoul of the law. The legislation “[a]uthorizes a student to record video or audio of class lectures for personal educational use, *in connection with a complaint to the public institution of higher education where the recording was made, or as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding*” (italics added).²⁶

Recent statements by lawyer Charles J. Cooper during oral arguments before the United States Court of Appeals’ Eleventh Circuit put the extent of the threat into sharper focus. As reported by Ryan Quinn in *Inside Higher Ed*, “Cooper told the three 11th Circuit judges that professors’ speech in the classroom is government speech, and ‘the state, when it is the speaker, it can choose what it wants to say.’” According to Quinn, Cooper said a state can “‘insist that professors not offer—or espouse, I should say, and endorse—viewpoints that are contrary to the state’s.’” When asked whether, following this logic, the state could prevent faculty from criticizing a governor or their administration, Quinn reports that Cooper replied in the affirmative: “‘I think, your honor, yes, because in the classroom the professor’s speech is the government’s speech and the government can restrict professors on a content-wide basis and restrict them from offering viewpoints.’”²⁷

Although Florida has been at the forefront of the movement away from DEI in higher education, this tendency is now more widespread. As of September 6, 2024, the “DEI Tracker” maintained by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* registered changes related to “offices, jobs, training, diversity statements, and other DEI-related activities” that two hundred institutions had made in thirty different states in response to anti-DEI legislation and mandates since January 2023.²⁸ In many cases, universities are reacting by creating new bureaucracies and reporting structures that allow members of the on-campus community to register complaints against faculty members.²⁹ What once seemed like a dystopian alternate reality in Florida and a few other places seems increasingly to be the environment in which many in higher education must routinely operate.³⁰

Why Digital Editing?

In such contexts, faculty must find ways to continue to help students engage with topics related to inclusivity, justice, and the appreciation of difference without jeopardizing their own professional futures. One way to do so is to create structured experiences through which learners can grapple with material, develop their own conclusions, and take leadership in sharing those ideas without the need for faculty to direct such conversations. Empowering students in this fashion not only gives them a greater amount of agency in their own learning but also, as student speech is not regulated, provides an avenue for addressing controversial topics in the classroom.

Digital documentary editing is one methodology that can be employed to such ends. By facilitating access to documents related to the experiences of a broad range of individuals and communities, including those that have historically been marginalized, faculty can prepare students to reflect on the personal and social realities expressed through those materials. Students can be encouraged to consider the perspectives

from which the items are written, analyze their importance, and think about how they support or contradict accepted narratives.

Several characteristics make documentary editing a productive methodology for facilitating the type of learning described here. Perhaps most importantly, editing historical documents is fundamentally about connecting with others. When we work on the transmission of written texts, we labor to understand the lives, ideas, and idiosyncrasies of people across temporal and cultural boundaries. Engaging with written texts is, at its most basic, about establishing contact with people, often despite distances that may otherwise make such connections unlikely or impossible. When we work with archival documents, people in the past speak to us in the present, and even though we are generally not the intended recipients of their messages, personal links are nonetheless forged between author and editor.

When done with honesty, editing promotes humility and a recognition of our own limitations. Our most well-reasoned editorial criteria can prove inadequate when engaging with the troublesome details of a text. Likewise, we can sometimes see in retrospect that different choices made at the beginning of a project would have been preferable. Even experienced paleographers at times get stuck on letters or words that someone with fresh eyes casually reads with ease. Editing makes evident the reality that understanding others involves not just openness but also effort, often in a collaborative context.

If done thoughtfully, editing also forces us to consider our own biases. To do our job well, editors must recognize our own assumptions and preconceived notions. We must think critically about how our own circumstances and experiences shape the ways we comprehend a piece of writing and influence the choices we make when presenting it to others. We must accept that we approach texts in ways that are not neutral and devise methods to minimize the consequences in the products of our editorial work.

Editing also presents complex and unavoidable ethical dimensions. Particularly when dealing with personal papers such as diaries, correspondence, and financial records, we face more basic questions about whether publishing such materials is appropriate. The ease with which we can make those items available online today must be considered against the ethics of doing so in particular cases. Such scrutiny is also called for on the level of editorial decision-making, as the processes involved in transcribing, encoding, and presenting a text require constant attention to questions of right and wrong. Editors must consider whether their choices are fair to both authors and readers. They must constantly ask whether they are being candid and transparent in making those decisions.

Editing is likewise a type of intellectual activity that teaches us to be patient and cautious. When we transmit the writing of other people, we assume a degree of responsibility for their voices and their legacies, both in the present and into the future. Unlike other types of student work that are discarded after being graded or at the completion of a term, students' editorial efforts can have an enduring life and usefulness beyond the course. Students find themselves called upon to exert a kind of care and deliberation that exceeds what may be required to earn a particular grade. Such a heightened level of personal investment mirrors the patience and care we must exert in the world more generally if we seek to value other people and understand their perspectives.

If designed with these ends in mind, a pedagogically focused project can provide opportunities to experience all these aspects of editing. When first engaging with archival documents, students often express their pleasure at seeing the past through the experiences of specific individuals, acknowledging that they had previously regarded the study of history as un compelling and impersonal. In their work, students frequently struggle with various aspects of the documents—such as deciphering handwriting, understanding outdated word usage, and deducing meaning from context—and thus recognize the need to seek help and work collaboratively. Materials related to contexts students believe they know—such as local history—can often defy their expectations and invite them to consider how their own assumptions impact their approach to the documents. Questions surrounding what we publish online, and how we approach that work, can help students to think about the larger ethical dilemmas that shape our experiences and often impact different groups in unequal ways. Participants are often impressed by the role they find themselves playing in constructing the stories we tell about the past and in the curation of the evidence on which they are built.

Despite its ability to function as a space in which students can explore topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, digital documentary editing can remain viable as a pedagogical approach because of its neutrality in methodological terms. Documentary editing is not fundamentally built on the types of critical constructs that have been misrepresented for political gain by actors outside the academy. Instead, the creation of documentary editions responds to ideas about how to best represent, transmit, and preserve information. Documentary editing comprises a set of principles and practices that are independent of any particular context or content and can therefore potentially withstand scrutiny in places where elected leaders express distrust of more theoretical approaches taken to the study of the past.

In more basic terms, digital documentary editing does not focus primarily on interpreting the past, but rather in making primary sources available. Such an emphasis on the material evidence of the past is an advantage in environments where actors outside the academy call for “fact-based” approaches to history. Even when they contain material that may complicate or contradict the narratives advocated by those in power, archival sources are themselves inherently a kind of “fact” that can be disputed only by questioning the existence of the item itself. Grounding academic work not primarily in ideas but in physical objects—particularly objects held by respected cultural heritage institutions—provides a legitimacy and inevitability to editorial work that makes it more difficult to assail than scholarship based on more abstract concepts that are more readily distorted or co-opted.

Digital documentary editing is not, of course, a solution for all educators in all situations. Nonetheless, those who are already involved in editing, or who work with the types of materials that could promote the kind of learning described here, should consider the transformative power of editorial work as a tool for teaching. Along with providing students with useful experiences of an applied nature—often rare in the humanities—editing can function as a tool for helping learners appreciate differences and overcome damaging, even dangerous stereotypes.

Student Reflections

To support the claims I am making, I will share reflections that my students have written about their experiences as editors. These materials proceed primarily from final essays and discussion board posts

written between 2020 and 2024 as part of a summer course I teach on digital editing and digital archives.³¹ The authors of these comments are students majoring in various fields, including English, History, Communication, and Spanish.

The course focuses on the edition of archival materials related to the local history of North Florida. The students have edited papers of Eartha M. M. White (1876–1974), a businesswoman, philanthropist, and key figure in the African American history of Jacksonville, held in Special Collections and University Archives at UNF. They have helped to publish the notes and draft narratives prepared by Viola Muse (1898–1981), a fieldworker with the Negro Writers Unit of the Florida Federal Writers Project, based in Jacksonville in the 1930s, whose materials are at the Jacksonville Historical Society. They have also worked with documents in Spanish from the Second Spanish Period (1783–1821) included in the East Florida Papers at the Library of Congress, as well as a variety of letters and other materials from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in North Florida located at UNF, the St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library, and the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Their editions are published on the websites of four projects: Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection, the Viola Muse Digital Edition, coloniaLab, and the North Florida Editorial Workshop.³²

Several of my students have reflected on being impacted by the personal connections they found to the documents. Kevin Vanderbilt worked with three letters written in Jacksonville in the 1880s. In his essay, he described how compelling he found the personal details in that correspondence, remarking on his experience with one document in particular: “I felt myself connect to a story of a mother writing to her beloved son on his birthday while he was away at school. I let every detail consume me, and I analyzed it as if it were my own mother.”³³

Finley Jensen thought explicitly about how such a link to people in the past can be forged through editorial work. Comparing his engagement with primary sources to more traditional course activities, he concluded that the former offered greater possibilities for connection: “It’s one thing, of course, to research a historical figure and understand their lives outwardly through secondhand resources, but it’s another thing entirely to be involved in the transcription of their personal life. In many ways, this method is much more intimate, more private, encouraging a closeness [. . .] that wouldn’t otherwise be available.”³⁴

Whitney Kerr considered the same matter from a different angle. She explained that her editing work helped her to understand her own family’s experiences within larger narratives in African American history: “I was lacking a connection that I did not even know existed until I had transcribed and edited other stories similar to that of my family.”³⁵ In reflecting on this years later, she reiterated this idea: “I really appreciate this class for how it has bridged the gap in my emotional understanding.”³⁶

Wendy Sinclair echoed this concept, pointing to how she believed this type of discovery was common to most students in the course: “[E]diting the collection has brought to the awareness of the class local history that most of us were relatively, or in other cases, entirely unaware of. If it weren’t for our opportunity through this course to edit documents relating to the Eartha White project, I’m certain most of us would have continued not knowing the history behind the Clara White Mission nor one of the most prominent figures in both African American and Jacksonville history.”³⁷

Students have observed that the documents have helped them to see historical figures as real people with personal lives and everyday problems. Corrine Benson, for instance, reflected on the emotions she was able to perceive in a letter from 1895 in the Eartha M. M. White Collection: “The letter shed light on Ms. White’s personal life through the eyes of her fiancé, the author.” Benson found in the layout of the text a window into the writer’s mind: “Mr. Jordan began the last page of the letter about one-third of the way down the page but closed it back at the top after running out of room below. This was endearing to me. It was as if he wanted to use every inch of the paper while expressing his thoughts to Eartha.”³⁸

Several students considered how editorial activity offers ways to reframe the past. Walker Morrow worked with a section of the 1850s will of an enslaver in North Florida. He edited the document’s “Schedule of Negro Property,” which enumerates enslaved persons by their names, ages, occupations, and appraised monetary values. In addition to creating a faithful transcription, Morrow prepared an introduction in which he sought to counter the narrative he felt the will created: “I wanted to highlight a clear difference between what I saw these people as—human—and what the person who wrote the will regarded them as—subhuman.”³⁹

Monique Lawson reflected on how the recovery of archival material can help us recreate histories that have been erased: “The work done by Viola Muse was truly fascinating and recorded the humanity of Black people. Now anyone is able to go online and see that in Jacksonville in the 1930s, Black people are artists; Black people are writers; Black people have families; Black people are poets, painters, and sculptors; and most of all, they are human.”⁴⁰

Their editorial work has enabled students to understand differently the city of Jacksonville itself. Timothy Berlin, for instance, expressed feeling “humbled” by discovering the gaps in his knowledge: “So much of Jacksonville I take for granted, without realizing it is so rich in history and culture,” he explained. “Taking part in this course has made me really appreciate the city I live in, despite its faults.”⁴¹

Pamela Brown makes a similar point, observing that gaining insight into the personal lives of historical figures helped her approach local history in a different way: “Learning to make decisions about these documents led me to shift my thoughts on history in general. Being able to look at this text that was written from a daughter in memory of her mother helped me see a more personal perspective on Florida’s history, rather than just what was written in a book.”⁴²

Kiara Cousins echoed this sentiment, affirming that her editorial work changed her understanding of the city’s importance in the context of African American history. “I am a little ashamed of how boring I have always found Jacksonville,” she confessed. “Sometimes you take things for granted until something comes along and shows you not to. I have a new-found love of history, especially African American history, after experiencing this digital editing class. The fact that such rich history existed right here in our backyards makes me proud, to be honest.”⁴³

Rochelle Craig and Bethany Ellison likewise pointed to ways that their experiences had implications for them beyond the purely academic. Craig reflected that “[t]his course has inspired me to consider the importance of historical preservation and offered me not only an academic framework but an understanding

of [local] African American history and its significant impact.”⁴⁴ Ellison considered how the activism and collaboration reflected in the documents inspired her to seek new opportunities for involvement with local nonprofits: “[L]earning about Eartha M. M. White has definitely made me think more about the positive impact that a community can achieve by organizing. It makes me want to look into similar organizations in present day Jacksonville and how I could support them.”⁴⁵

Students also reflected on the responsibility that they saw themselves assuming as they undertook editorial projects. Chloé Baker considered the question of bias: “One of the most valuable parts was all of the knowledge I gained on subjectivity and objectivity in editing,” she observed. “There is really no true way to be completely objective, but being aware that the way you edit something may impose your own thoughts or feelings on the subject is the first step.”⁴⁶

Darcy Alden likewise contemplated the high stakes involved in editorial practice: “The job of a textual editor carries with it a surprising amount of responsibility,” she affirmed. “Any number of factors, be it bias or even just carelessness, could ultimately distort history and hide important events and people from public knowledge.”⁴⁷

Alina Stevens reflected on the responsibility of the editor in another way, describing editing as an opportunity to right the wrongs of the past. “I did not think that this class would impact me the way that it has,” she explained. “Working with these documents was so gratifying and gave me such an enormous sense of purpose. This project finally gives voices to people who should have been listened to a long time ago.”⁴⁸

In her reflections, Sophie Marshall summed up the themes discussed here: “Transcribing documents from the Eartha M. M. White Collection was a deeply meaningful experience,” she observed. “I found myself connected to the past, reliving the stories and struggles of individuals who shaped history. This interaction with primary sources imbued me with a profound sense of responsibility to preserve and share these narratives accurately. It reiterated the significance of digital archives in shaping historical discourse and challenged me to approach the transcription process with sensitivity and empathy.”

Marshall pointed to one document in particular: “The first document I worked on, a letter from Archdeacon Henry Brown to Eartha M. M. White from 1920, inspired this feeling in me greatly,” she explained. “The letter was of a personal matter, a death in the family. Not only that, but there was a small, unrelated note-to-self on the back. Things such as this bring me back to the reality that these are real people experiencing these events, making it all the more important to preserve the legacy and history left behind.”⁴⁹

Conclusion

As these reflections show, students tasked with selecting and editing documents gained more than knowledge about how to carry out transcription and markup. In response to general prompts asking them to consider their experiences and what they had learned, many opted to discuss how their editorial work had changed them as people. They explored how their efforts helped them to see themselves in new ways and to reconsider their relationships with the city and its past. They also expressed concern about the role that editors can play, even unintentionally, in silencing or distorting other people’s histories.

In a time when educators are prohibited from speaking freely about matters related to diversity and inclusion, the reflections of these students are encouraging. They engage directly with the questions of justice, acceptance, and respect that are so central to much of what we do in the humanities and in higher education in general. They arrived at those ideas not by being told what to think, but through largely self-directed, hands-on work with real cultural heritage material. Editing can be a powerful tool for creating situations in which students can make these kinds of discoveries, and in which they can come to see themselves as people with the ability to effect change. Editing can function as a pedagogy of empathy and tolerance at a time when other routes to teaching those concepts have been restricted or eliminated.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Jennifer Bibb, Savannah Almond, Emily Bartley, Amelia Dixon, Jace Fenton, Amanda Gailey, Laura Heffernan, Tru Leverette Hall, Constanza López Baquero, Courtney Robinson, Andy Rush, M. Starratt, Susan Swiatosz, Khoranhalai J. Washington, Nikolaus Wasmoen, Matthew Welcome, and Sharelle Williams. He is also grateful to the UNF Thomas G. Carpenter Library; the UNF Digital Humanities Institute; the UNF Department of English; the UNF Department of History; the UNF Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures; the Association for Documentary Editing; the Jacksonville Historical Society; the St. Augustine Historical Society; the University at Buffalo; and the Women Writers Project.

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 3. Amanda Gailey, “Teaching Attentive Reading and Motivated Writing through Digital Editing,” *CEA Critic* 76, no. 2 (2014): 191–99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cea.2014.0011>. ↩
 4. Camden Burd, “Close Reading and Coding with the Seward Family Digital Archive: Digital Documentary Editing in the Undergraduate History Classroom,” in *Quick Hits for Teaching with Digital Humanities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16rdcq.6>. ↩
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10. Susan M. Felch, "The Backward Gaze: Editing Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Prayerbook," in *Editing Early Modern Women*, ed. Sarah C. E. Ross and Paul Salzman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 34. ↵
11. Felch, "The Backward Gaze," 21. ↵
12. Felch, "The Backward Gaze," 35. ↵
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17. Schroeder et al., "Working with Mayhew," 58. ↵
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25. See Ryan Quinn, “A Big Chunk of Professors Flunked U of Florida Post-Tenure Review,” *Inside Higher Ed*, August 7, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/tenure/2024/08/07/big-chunk-professors-flunked-uf-post-tenure-review>; and Nancy Guan, “Florida Faculty Say Morale Has ‘Dropped Significantly’ After New State Law,” WUSF, WLRN PBS News, August 13, 2024, <https://www.wlrn.org/education/2024-08-13/florida-faculty-say-morale-has-dropped-significantly-after-new-state-law>. ↩
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29. Maggie Hicks, “The New Anti-DEI Bureaucracy,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 21, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-new-anti-dei-bureaucracy>. ↵
30. This article was written prior to the 2024 presidential election and the executive actions in the first half of 2025 that have led to the dismantling of programs and curricula related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in education at all levels throughout the United States. ↵
31. Some comments are from subsequent email correspondence, as noted. The students’ comments have been anonymized and edited for purposes of style and consistency. This course evolved from the 2016 experiment described in Clayton McCarl, “Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection: An Experiment in Engaging Students in Archival Research and Editorial Practice,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44, no. 4 (2018): 527–37, doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.02.011. ↵
32. Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection, 2016, <https://unfdhi.org/earthawhite>; Viola Muse Digital Edition, 2021, <https://violamuse.unfdhi.org>; coloniaLab, 2016, <https://colonialab.org>; North Florida Editorial Workshop, 2020, <https://nfew.org>. ↵
33. Kevin Vanderbilt, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2020. ↵
34. Finley Jensen, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2024. ↵
35. Whitney Kerr, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2021. ↵
36. Whitney Kerr, email to author, January 29, 2024. ↵
37. Wendy Sinclair, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2024. ↵
38. Corrine Benson, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2023. ↵
39. Walker Morrow, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2020. ↵
40. Monique Lawson, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2021. ↵
41. Timothy Berlin, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2021. ↵

- 42. Pamela Brown, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2023. [↩](#)
- 43. Kiara Cousins, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2021. [↩](#)
- 44. Rochelle Craig, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2024. [↩](#)
- 45. Bethany Ellison, DIG4152 discussion post, August 2, 2024 (11:35 a.m.). [↩](#)
- 46. Chloé Baker, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2020. [↩](#)
- 47. Darcy Alden, DIG3152 final reflective essay, 2021. [↩](#)
- 48. Alina Stevens, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2023. [↩](#)
- 49. Sophie Marshall, DIG4152 final reflective essay, 2023. [↩](#)