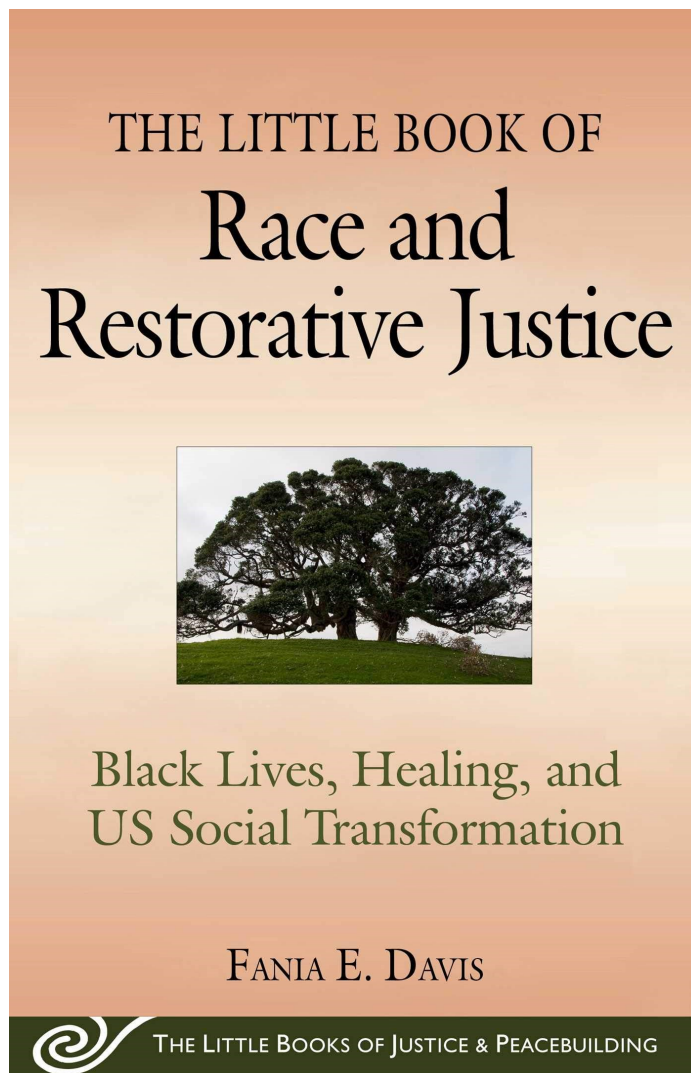


# Race and Restorative Justice Study Group Toolkit



Brattleboro Community Justice Center

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January 2021

# Table of Contents

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## Background

Who We Are.....	3
Study Group Overview.....	3
Study Group Goals and Learning Objectives.....	4
Goal of this Toolkit.....	4

## Setting Up the Study Group

Spreading the Word.....	5
Study Group Logistics.....	5

## Lesson Plans

Session One.....	6
Session Two.....	7
Session Three.....	8
Session Four.....	9
Session Five.....	10
Session Six.....	11

## Reflections and Possibilities

Facilitation.....	12
Additional Resources.....	12
Timing and Schedule.....	13
Future Study Groups.....	14
Acknowledgements.....	15

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# Background

## Who We Are

BRATTLEBORO COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER



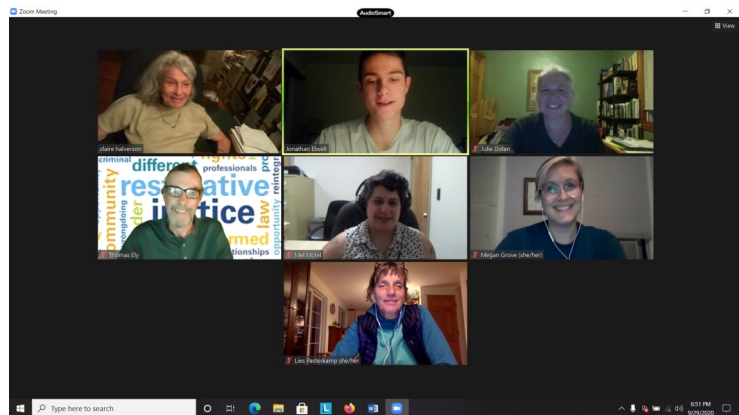
The Brattleboro Community Justice Center (BCJC) is a community made up of 3 staff, 1 intern, 50 volunteers, and numerous program participants who work together to build relationships and repair harm. We run restorative justice programs in schools and neighborhoods; provide mediation around community conflicts; facilitate interventions with individuals involved in the criminal legal system; work with individuals returning to our community after incarceration; and train people in schools, neighborhoods, and community organizations to use restorative justice skills. The BCJC operates in coordination and coalition with State agencies, community organizations, and restorative justice groups at the local, county, and state levels to both serve our clients effectively and transform relationships, communities, and institutions.

## Study Group Overview

In September and October, 2020, we held a six-week study group focused on Fania Davis' book, *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice*. The study group met once a week on Tuesday evenings from 6:00-7:30 PM.

Three volunteers, one board member, and one staff member participated in the group. Facilitation was shared by a rotating group of staff, board members, and local racial justice advocates - some of whom also participated in the group during the sessions which they were not facilitating. The rotation ensured that each session was facilitated by one new facilitator and one of the two from the previous session (Session 1: A/B, Session 2: B/C, Session 3: C/D, etc.). Everyone who was a part of the study group identifies as white.

The study group was created and organized by BCJC's Diversity, Equity, and Social Inclusion (DISE) Committee, which is composed of two staff members, one board member, and one volunteer.



# Background

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## Study Group Goals and Learning Objectives

### Overall Goals:

- Cultivate a shared understanding of the intersections of racism, white supremacy and restorative justice among the staff, volunteers, and board of the BCJC.
- Begin to identify, uproot, and challenge the ways in which racism and white supremacy manifest in the operations of the BCJC.

### Overall Learning Objectives:

- Develop *knowledge*:
  - Be able to identify, analyze and discuss white supremacy, racism, and their intersections with restorative justice.
  - Understand systemic harm and systemic racism and how it operates. Expand the lens of restorative justice work beyond addressing individual harm to addressing systemic harm.
- Develop *self-awareness*:
  - How do you see yourself in connection to these systems?
  - Be able to make connections and name examples of how racism and white supremacy show up in the work of the BCJC.

*Each session should try to address the work of the BCJC. The hope is that we will apply this knowledge to the work we do and the practices we utilize in carrying out restorative justice. E.g. what should we stop/start/continue doing in our work? Co-facilitators should keep this in mind when structuring discussion questions.*

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## Goal of this Toolkit

This toolkit attempts to share information and reflections about our race and restorative justice study group experience. While it was written with other Community Justice Centers and restorative practitioners in mind, we welcome any and all people to use this resource however they see fit. Please take it, use it, change it, and let us know what you think and what you do. Just as we have shared this toolkit so that you can learn from our experience, we also hope to learn from yours! If you do have thoughts that you'd like to share, please get in touch with us by emailing [director@brattleborocjc.org](mailto:director@brattleborocjc.org).

# Setting Up the Study Group

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## Spreading the Word

All of our communication and outreach was done remotely, due to COVID-19. And as the study group was only open to folks already associated with BCJC (volunteers, staff, and board members), our only method of recruitment was internal email messages through Mail Chimp. You can see a portion of the first email below. These emails directed folks to RSVP using a Google form, which asked for the following information—name; email; if they expected to miss any of the six sessions; preference between a hard/digital copy of the book; any support needed for Zoom or captioning; and an opportunity to share any other concerns or questions.

### Race and Restorative Justice Study Group

**Race and Restorative Justice Study Group**

Join the Justice Center as we discuss Fania Davis' *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice* and the ways in which racism and white supremacy manifest in the operations of the BCJC.

**Dates: Sept 1- Oct 6 on Tuesdays from 6-7:30pm**

**Location: Zoom**

THE LITTLE BOOK OF  
Race and Restorative Justice

Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation

FANIA E. DAVIS

The Little Book of Justice & Reconciliation

Dear BCJC Staff, Volunteers, and Board Members,

As briefly mentioned in the last volunteer newsletter, the Justice Center will be offering a 6 week study group for the BCJC community discussing Fania Davis' *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice* as well as a few supplementary resources. Below you'll find the study group's goals, details, requirements, and how to RSVP.

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## Study Group Logistics

The entire study group was conducted over Zoom and we used the same meeting link throughout for simplicity. The facilitators for the upcoming session sent email reminders every Monday.

The book is split into seven chapters. Our first five sessions dealt with one chapter each, with the final session covering Chapters 6 and 7. The actual lesson plans, which you will find in the next section, were put together by the pair of facilitators before each meeting. With the framework of the study group's overarching goals and the content of each chapter to guide them, the facilitators were free to craft each session as they saw fit.

# Lesson Plans

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## Session One: The Journey to Racial and Restorative Justice

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 1, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice* and “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture”, keeping the idea of \*meetings\* in mind

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome & Intros
  - Name, Pronouns, Connection to the BCJC
  - Why did you sign up for the study group?

#### Part 1: Initial Group Agreements (35 min)

- Reactions to reading the WSC piece?
- Which WSC characteristics are prominent in your life?
- When WSC is in play at meetings, what does it look like? How can we use the antidotes to create agreements that push back against that?
- How can we create a space where we can challenge one another?
- How are we entering the space technically? Hand raising? Unmuting self? Stack?
- Now that we’ve come up with the agreements, who is responsible for holding people accountable?

#### Part 2: Reading Discussion (35 min)

- Davis writes that "Indigenous protocol" invites introductions through ancestors, lineage, and lands. She then shares her story of how she came to embrace racial justice and restorative justice. What about you? Who do you bring with you to this conversation? What experiences or people brought you to restorative justice and/or racial justice?
- On page 6, she writes “As a preteen, I developed a visceral response to injustice and engaged in my own spontaneous acts of resistance.” When did you develop a response to injustice? What were your acts of resistance?
- On page 7, she writes "It did not take long, however, to discover racial discrimination existed up north, too, though it was expressed more subtly." How do you see racism expressed more subtly in Brattleboro/VT? At the BCJC?

#### Closing (10 min)

- What are you taking from this session?
- How did we do with the agreements?
- Next Session: Sept 8, Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice

# Lesson Plans

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## Session Two: The Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 2, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice*

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome
  - Check In - How are you showing up today?
  - Reintroduce Agreements/Norms: What's one agreement that's resonating for you or that has been at play in discussions so far?

#### Part 1: Indigenous Justice (35 min)

- How can we practice restorative justice in a way that is respectful of its indigenous roots without engaging in cultural appropriation?
- How can we build accountability with indigenous groups in our communities?

#### [BREAK?]

#### Part 2: Foundations of Restorative Practices (35 min)

- What does it mean to move “from an individualist ‘I’ to a communalist ‘we’?”  
Have you experienced this in your work?
- Is our ability to practice restorative justice limited by the constraints of the criminal legal system? If so, how? And how can we adjust these constraints to better engage in restorative practices?

#### Closing (10 min)

- What are you taking from this session?
- How did we do with the agreements?
- Next Session: Sept 15, Integrating Racial Justice and Restorative Justice

# Lesson Plans

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## Session Three: Integrating Racial Justice and Restorative Justice

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 3, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice*

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome
  - Check In - How are you showing up today?
  - Reintroduce Agreements/Norms: What's one agreement that's resonating for you or that has been at play in discussions so far?

#### Part 1: Structural Racism (35 min)

- What is your current knowledge and understanding of structural racism?
- What have you learned from this chapter and from recent events about racism?

[BREAK?]

#### Part 2: Structural Change (35 min)

- Davis writes on page 35: "Healing interpersonal harm requires...transforming the socio-historical conditions and institutions that are structured precisely to perpetuate harm." What are these conditions?
- How are institutions structured to perpetuate harm?
- What does the work of transforming systems actually look like?
- What needs to transform in BCJC, locally, statewide, nationally?

#### Closing (10 min)

- What are you taking from this session?
- How did we do with the agreements?
- Next Session: Sept 22, Race, Restorative Justice, and Schools



# Lesson Plans

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## Session Four: Race, Restorative Justice, and Schools

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 4, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice*

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome
  - Check In - How are you showing up today?
  - Reintroduce Agreements/Norms: What's one agreement that's resonating for you or that has been at play in discussions so far?

#### Part 1: Racism and Restorative Justice in Schools (35 min)

- From reading this chapter and any personal experience/knowledge you have, let's look at the individual/systemic/structural racism we talked about last time: What are some examples of how those three "circles" play out in schools?
- RJ does reduce disparities in schools but you have to "do it right." What does "doing it right" mean?

[BREAK?]

#### Part 2: Apply to Our Work (35 min)

- Does RJ actually reduce disparities in the adult justice system?
- Based on ideas from school context in the book, what would need to happen for RJ to substantially reduce or ameliorate racial disparities in the adult criminal justice system?

#### Closing (10 min)

- What are you taking from this session?
- How did we do with the agreements?
- Next Session: Sept 29, Restorative Justice and Transforming Mass Incarceration

# Lesson Plans

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## Session Five: Restorative Justice and Transforming Mass Incarceration

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 5, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice*

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome
  - Check In - How are you showing up today?
  - Reintroduce Agreements/Norms: What's one agreement that's resonating for you or that has been at play in discussions so far?

#### Part 1: Racism and Mass Incarceration (35 min)

- How has this chapter and what has been going on in the world recently informed your thinking about mass incarceration?
- What do you see as the role of restorative justice in challenging mass incarceration?
- Fania talks about abolition as both presence and absence: What does she mean and what do you think about that?

[BREAK?]

#### Part 2: Apply to Our Work (35 min)

- How does this relate to Vermont and the BCJC?
- How do you hear people in our community talk about racism and mass incarceration?

#### Closing (10 min)

- What are you taking from this session?
- How did we do with the agreements?
- Next Session: Oct 6, Final Study Group session

# Lesson Plans

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## Session Six: A Racial Reckoning and a Way Forward

*Facilitators:* [Names]

- Homework: Read Ch. 6 & 7, *Little Book of Race & Restorative Justice*

### Agenda

#### Introduction (10 min)

- Welcome
  - Check In - How are you showing up today?
  - Reintroduce Agreements/Norms: What's one agreement that's resonating for you or that has been at play in discussions so far?

#### Part 1: Applying Davis' Models to Our Communities (25 min)

- As you're reading about these models, what are the elements of a model that might be appropriate for Vermont?
- Where do you see this happening already? What are the limitations and barriers and how can they be addressed and overcome?

[BREAK?]

#### Part 2: Carrying Racial Justice Through Our Work (40 min)

- Fania talks about the need to be both healer (from restorative justice) and activist (for racial justice): What does this mean to you and how could you do it?
- What are talking points you might use?
- How can you apply this to your work as an RJ practitioner?
- What can we as a Justice Center do?

#### Closing (15 min)

- What are you taking from this whole series?

# Reflections and Possibilities

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## Group Feedback

Following the conclusion of the study group, we conducted interviews with participants and facilitators to get their feedback. Here are a few of the major themes that emerged from these conversations, along with some of our reflections and possibilities for future work.

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## Facilitation

Participants generally felt very positively about the rotating facilitators. Several people mentioned that they appreciated hearing different voices, learning from different experiences, and the way that the rotating facilitation brought some variety to the group.

Most also mentioned, however, that they really would have appreciated more clarity about the plan for facilitation. While the facilitators knew who would be running each session before the study group began, this information was not shared with participants. Several said that this left them surprised or unsettled, especially when they had hoped to discuss certain topics with previous facilitators who were then absent from subsequent meetings.

Similarly, some facilitators participated in most - if not all - of the sessions that they did not facilitate, while others were only able to be present for the sessions they facilitated. Several group members noted disappointment at this lack of consistency.

Ultimately, the consensus among participants was that the rotating facilitation brought important variety and diverse perspectives and that facilitators were very welcome to join as participants when they were not facilitating - and that greater clarity and consistency would be valuable improvements for future groups.

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## Additional Resources

Another frequently discussed topic was the possibility of bringing additional resources into conversation with Davis' book - with the hope that these added pieces could enrich our discussions and learning. During our study group, we used only one additional resource - *The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture* from Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun - and this was used only in the first session to inform our setting of group norms. Now we are thinking more broadly about resources that could be inserted throughout the study group to be more directly engaged with as part of the curriculum.

## Reflections and Possibilities

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Opinions on this possibility were generally positive - folks liked the idea of bringing more voices, experiences, and knowledge into our discussions. Some mentioned several moments during our sessions when people referenced articles or books they had read and how those references enriched and deepened our conversation.

Most people also had very strong opinions on the drawbacks of including too much additional out-of-class work and how this could turn off potential group members or burn out folks who do join the group. The consensus is that any additional resources should be videos, audio recordings, or very short articles or excerpts of text. Folks agreed that videos and audio recordings should not exceed 30 minutes - leaving the option of shorter sources or excerpts from longer works. For the written resources, people were adamant about the importance of brevity - any texts should be 5-10 minute reads.

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### Timing and Schedule

Another topic that came up frequently in feedback conversations was the timing and schedule of the study group. Our group met on Tuesday evenings from 6:00-7:30 PM. The group widely agreed that an hour and a half was just about the right amount of time for our meetings, allowing for plenty of depth and discussion without feeling forced or tired.

Many folks also reflected on the challenge of having an engaged conversation for an hour and a half at the end of a long day. For them, it wasn't necessarily that they wished the sessions were any shorter, just that having them in the evening required a lot of energy and interrupted other activities like cooking and eating. Some mentioned that they also could have met during the day, but realized that this might have been impossible for other group members.

Our takeaway here is that the 90-minute sessions were appropriate, especially with check-ins to see if the group would like to take a short break. It could be beneficial to offer multiple group meeting times, with some in the day time and others in the evening, in an attempt to accommodate different schedules and personal preferences.

# Reflections and Possibilities

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## **Future Study Groups**

While reflecting on our study group, one participant described it as a 100-level introductory course. This got us thinking - 100-level courses are not designed to stand alone, but to provide a useful introduction and valuable foundation for further learning. So then what would a 200-level course look like? Or a 300-level? How can we take what we've learned from this experience and explore certain topics in greater depth or apply them to issues that are specific to our local context? In addition to future study groups with new content, we have also discussed the possibility of repeating this study group with facilitation by previous study group participants. This would enable us to repeat the study group without putting an additional burden on the original facilitators, as well as further developing our community's collective capacity to lead and engage in thoughtful, purposeful conversations around racial justice.

# Reflections and Possibilities

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## Acknowledgements

First, we need to express our gratitude for Fania Davis and her book on which our study group is based. She is a founder and former Executive Director of Restorative Justice of Oakland Youth (RJOY). After coming of age in Birmingham, Alabama, and being active in the Civil Rights, Black liberation, women's, prisoners', peace, and anti-apartheid movements, Davis received her law degree from UC Berkeley in 1979 and practiced as a Civil Rights trial lawyer for 27 years. She then received a PhD in Indigenous Studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies in 2003 and, since then, has been involved in a variety of restorative and alternative justice practices.

*The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation* was published in April 2019. If you are reading this Toolkit on your computer, you can follow [THIS LINK](#) to purchase the book. You can also find more information about RJOY at [www.rjoyoakland.org](http://www.rjoyoakland.org).

There are many people in our BCJC community who have made invaluable contributions to the realization of the study group and this accompanying guide. We recognize BCJC's Diversity, Equity, and Social Equity Committee—Grace Koch, Claire Halverson, Samia Abbass, and Mel Motel—for their vision and collaboration to create the study group in the summer of 2020. We also want to thank the facilitators—Grace, Claire, Mel, and Ethan Hazzard-Watkins—for their skill and thoughtfulness in leading our group's conversations. We also owe a huge thank you to our study group participants—Julie Dolan, Thomas Ely, Megan Grove, and Lies Pasterkamp—for giving their time and energy to our community and bringing their insight and wisdom to our conversations—as well as for their feedback which has enriched this Toolkit. Finally, we recognize Mel and Jonathan Elwell for their work to bring this Toolkit to fruition—and also as the folks to whom you should direct your feedback and criticism.

If you do have thoughts that you'd like to share, you can email us at [director@brattleborocjc.org](mailto:director@brattleborocjc.org).