Source Analysis

* What is the creator’s main claim, thesis, or argument?
* Is the creator trying to prove anything?
* Why was the source created?
* What was the purpose of the source?
* Who was the audience for the source?
* What does this source teach us?
* How does the source help us understand something about our problem?
* When was the source created and what did it mean to the people during that time?
* Consider the creator and what perspective/bias that might bring to the article.
* Consider what in the source doesn’t fit or might surprise you.
* Does the source remind you of anything?
* Why is this source important?

Due Date: Make up work Name: Troy Shaffer

Source Analysis

Title: It’s time to re-examine the history of botanical collections

Author: Alexandre Antonelli

Source Date: 25 June 2020

Source Type: Article

Context (what is important to note about the creator, when it was created, its audience, or its format?):

This article was written by Professor Alexandre Antonelli, who is the Director of Kew Science. This article was written in 2020, during the global pandemic, and is for the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens website.

Summary (what important facts about the source’s content we should note for our discussion):

Antonelli is the head of Science at Kew in Britain. He talks about the how his home country Brazil is represented incorrectly in the textbooks he read in school. He was taught that the Portuguese had discovered Brazil in 1500. Even though millions of people had already lived there before the Portuguese “discovered” Brazil was not even mentioned in the books. He was taught about the exploitation of Brazil’s natural resources through Brazil’s native people and African Slaves. Although all of these negative things happened, Antonelli is proud of Brazil’s reputation of being the world’s most biodiverse country. Colonial botanists like Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace were “astonished” by the Amazon and spent years studying it. Colonial botanists like Darwin and Wallace were usually sent on dangerous expeditions to find profitable plants but “in the name of science”. Antonelli also mentions how Kew, the place he works for, was also heavily rooted in Colonialism. Botany is not the only area with traces of Colonial Exploitation, its everywhere. But history cannot be changed but we can learn from it, so Antonelli believes if we truly understand the power dynamics of the present, it will pave the way of for a better future. There is an imperial view that prevails over Antonelli’s own field of research, such as how scientists are still “discovering” new species every year. But these species are mostly already known and have been used by natives of the region for thousands of years. The knowledge of the natives have been appropriated by scientists and has also been downplayed of its depth and complexity. The people who inhabited Brazil and even Australia first, who discovered the plants, are never named, recognized, or compensated. Antonelli says that they have become quite literally invisible in history, and this needs to change.

There are several challenges ahead of us. These challenges including climate change and overpopulation. With these we need to protect the natural ecosystems across the globe. The lowest income countries are bound to be affected the most. Kew collaborates with Columbia to map useful plants to promote sustainability with natural resources. Antonelli says that Kew is working on re-examining its practices to encourage diverse perspectives.

Analysis (what should we take away to better understand our problem and its stakeholders?):

I chose to read this article to try to get a better understanding of the botany side of our research. This is the article you mentioned in class, but I found it very helpful to read it myself, since my research before the combination of our research teams had a different focus. I feel like this article directly relates to the work your research team was focused on before I had joined. The author of this article Alexandre Antonelli who is the head of science at Kew, starts the article off talking about how schools taught and continue to teach history incorrectly. His home country Brazil was supposedly discovered by the Portuguese even though there was natives in Brazil who had lived there for thousands of years before it was “discovered”. He related this to the study of botany and how plants are “discovered” by botanists who come in and claim they found a new species. Even though the species they “discovered” has been used by the native people for thousands of years, and these natives are never given the recognition they deserve. Antonelli wants to change this, through his work at Kew. He believes that we cannot change history but if we actually teach it correctly and fully, change can happen.