RECOGNITION, REASSESSMENT, AND REMEDIATION

A small scale approach to improving harmful or exclusionary descriptive practices in the archives
INTRODUCTIONS

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AGENDA

- Introductions & Definitions
- Discussion questions
- Providence College, Michelle
- Salve Regina University, Genna
- Discussion questions
WHAT IS REPARATIVE DESCRIPTION OR CONSCIOUS EDITING?

reparative description

*n.* remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resources

archival silence

*n.* the unintentional or purposeful absence or distortion of documentation of enduring value, resulting in gaps and inabilities to represent the past accurately
WHAT IS REPARATIVE DESCRIPTION OR CONSCIOUS EDITING?

conscious editing

[The archives] “seeks to redress historical inequities and injustices in the ways language is used in archives and special collections. These efforts include replacing racist and derogatory language and removing biased language that assumes whiteness as a default. It also involves updating unbalanced descriptions... and bringing the voices and experiences of marginalized groups to the forefront. Hidden lives and erased histories thus become discoverable for researchers, in the classroom, and through exhibitions.”

UNC Conscious Editing Initiative
EXAMPLE INITIATIVES & DESCRIPTIVE GUIDANCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
Conscious Editing Initiative

TUFTS UNIVERSITY
Content Warnings and Harmful Description Remediation

ARCHIVES FOR BLACK LIVES PHILADELPHIA
Anti-Racist Description Resources

Photos by Aaron Burden, Julian Schultz, James Eades on Unsplash
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

*Please think about these questions as we present our experiences. We will have time at the end to answer other questions and respond to thoughts on these:*

1. Have you made any changes to your descriptive practices? Were these staff/faculty driven or were they in response to concerns or complaints from users?

2. Who on your library or archives staff should be included in these discussions and the resulting work?

3. Do you have in mind collections you would like to prioritize for reparative description? How would you assess your particular collections?
WHO DOES THE WORK?

ARCHIVISTS & LIBRARIANS
- Setting standards
- Best practices
- Access

STUDENT WORKERS
- Following processes
- Identifying issues
- Skills & perspective

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS
- Expertise
- Mutual support
- Access

USERS
- Identify needs
- Feedback
- Access
TRAINING & PREPARING FOR THE WORK

➔ Webinars & readings
  ◆ Include all staff, students, anyone working on this
  ◆ Create a shared context

➔ Set small goals for specific projects
  ◆ Used small collections as case studies

➔ Established workflows
  ◆ Identified impact points
END USER CONSIDERATIONS

➔ Improved access points & new areas of research
➔ How users get to collections
  ◆ Archivist-aided vs independent access
END USER CONSIDERATIONS

➔ Problematic descriptions of primary sources

➔ Harmful primary sources

➔ Actions & response
  ◆ Trigger warnings
  ◆ Transparency
  ◆ Take down requests
DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

➔ Retain copies of legacy descriptions and collection access points
  ◆ Citations and references

➔ Cross-department impact
  ◆ Cataloguing
  ◆ Digital collections
  ◆ Teaching resources

➔ Iterative process
  ◆ Never done
Graduate Assistant revision project

Rhode Island 11th Heavy Artillery Collection
- U.S. Civil War collection, RI Black regiment
- Military records and personal papers
- Some digitized

Challenges
- Formal title of Black regiments include harmful term to describe Black troops
- Descriptions of soldiers and other persons include harmful or triggering language
- Lack of biographical detail causes misinterpretation

The next 2 slides contain images of text which includes racist, outdated, and/or harmful language pertaining to people of color
Graduate Assistant revision project

Rhode Island 11th Heavy Artillery Collection

**Collection Overview**

- **Title:** Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery (Colored)
- **Date range:** 1853-1913
- **Creator:** Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery (Colored), 1863-1865
- **Extent:** 3 box(es)
- **Abstract:**
  The collection consists of official records of the Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery (Colored) and the personal correspondence of Lt. Allen F. Cameron, who was one of the regiment's officers. The regimental records consist of materials such as regimental reports, orders, rosters, and courts-martial records detailing activities of the regiment, life in the Union Army and treatment of black troops by white officers.
**Collection Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title:</th>
<th>Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery <em>(Colored)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date range:</td>
<td>1853-1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator:</td>
<td>Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery <em>(Colored)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1863-1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent:</td>
<td>3 box(es)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The collection consists of official records of the Rhode Island 11th United States Heavy Artillery, a Black volunteer infantry *(Colored)* and the personal correspondence of Lt. Allen F. Cameron, who was one of the regiment's white commanding officers. The regimental records consist of materials such as regimental reports, orders, rosters, and courts-martial records detailing activities of the regiment, life in the Union Army and Black troops’ dealings with white officers, treatment of black troops by white officers.
Teaching hard histories

➔ Not always about removing objects or changing vocabulary
   ◆ Selecting materials for instruction
➔ Preparing users for the experience
➔ Providing context for understanding and self care
EXAMPLES FROM PROVIDENCE COLLEGE ASC

Domino effect: Image renaming & collection reorganization

➔ Sports collections arranged by sport
➔ Male as default
➔ Women’s sports are described Women_sport
➔ Co-ed club & recreational sports
UP NEXT FOR PC

➔ Formalize workflow
  ◆ Address legacy finding aids

➔ Collections without finding aids or access points
  ◆ Applying to new descriptions vs revising legacy guides

➔ Improved descriptions and access to college records
  ◆ Will help us identify archival silences
  ◆ Target outreach
  ◆ Opportunities for student involvement (documenting activism, etc.)
Genna Duplisea
Salve Regina University

Assistant archivist attends the 2021 New England Archivists Spring Meeting.
examining gender bias in metadata

- Erasure of women/people occupying traditionally “feminine” roles
- Assumptions of gender
- Extra research necessary to locate and identify women in historical documents
- Religious names, changed names, and shifting identities
names & personhood

George Andrade and Robert McKenna shaking hands [...] (1991),
https://library.artstor.org/public/24647386
Mrs. D’Amico, Albert D’Amico, Sister Lucille McKillop [...] (ca. 1979-1980),
https://library.artstor.org/public/SS7731274_7731274_12920033
Agent entry for Catherine M. Sullivan,
https://salvearchives.libraryhost.com/agents/sullivan_catherine_m
decentering gender assumptions

The Foreigner performance photograph (2002),
https://library.artstor.org/public/SS7731274_7731274_13004057
The following slides include images of historical documents which use outdated or offensive language to describe race, and which demonstrate the evaluation of human beings as property. I will not say these racial terms out loud. My goal of this presentation is to address how to describe such content and meaning without repeating the harm these terms can cause.
documenting slavery project

• Partnership with South Kingstown Town Clerk’s office, faculty, students
• First semester of student work funded by Rhode Island Foundation’s Joseph O’Neill Ott Fund
• Goal: To recognize the dignity and humanity of people represented in archival records, which they were not granted in the time period represented
locating people in slavery

Will and Inventory of Estate of Stephen Hassard (1718),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.23933590
“preserve but contextualize” language

Will and Inventory of Estate of Ephraim Smith (1722),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.24125578
Chipuxet River, two enslaved boys named Peter and James, and livestock. Hannah left his daughter, Mary Niles and her husband Nathaniel Niles, the part of his land residing on the west side of the Chipuxet River and an enslaved women named Jane and her daughter Judeth. When Nathaniel and Mary Niles pass away, the land will be passed down to their two sons named Nathan and Robert Niles. Hannah is also leaving his granddaughter Mary Niles an enslaved girl named Katherine. Hannah leaves the house, the rest of the land, and a mixed-race enslaved girl named Freelove to his wife Mary Hannah. The inventory of his estate includes livestock, one enslaved women and her five children, guns and

Will and Inventory of Estate of Robert Hannah (1706),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.23933520
when standards are not justice

Will and Inventory of Estate of William Gardner (1710),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.23933527

Will and Inventory of Estate of Robert Hannah (1706),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/comm unity.23933520
slavery and indenture

Will and Inventory of Estate of Jeffery Champlin (1717/8),
https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.23933564
looking ahead

• Linked data creation and contribution to enslaved.org
• Examine descriptors of enslaved workers to illuminate the presence of people who were Indigenous and Black
• Base class assignment or entire course on using documents
• Support historical and perhaps genealogical research
collections links

Archives photographs:
http://bitly.com/salve-archives-photos

South Kingstown Colonial Documents:
https://www.jstor.org/site/salve-regina-university/south-kingstown-colonial-records/

Salve Regina’s ArchivesSpace:
http://salvearchives.libraryhost.com
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We welcome responses to the questions shared or you may ask your own. Please use the raise hand function OR type your question in the chat.

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THANK YOU


