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Toward Culturally Competent Archival (Re)Description of Marginalized Histories

Annie Tang
Dorothy Berry
Kelly Bolding
Rachel E. Winston

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Toward Culturally Competent Archival (Re)Description of Marginalized Histories

Comments
This panel was presented at Archives*Records 2018, the Society of American Archivists conference, in August 2018 in Washington, D.C.
Toward Culturally Competent Archival
(Re)Description of Marginalized Histories

A #saa18 panel presentation by:
Dorothy Berry
Kelly Bolding
Annie Tang
Rachel E. Winston
#s101
“When it is finally written”

Cultural continuum
Cultural literacy
Cultural humility

Critical librarianship
Radical archives
Three women go public with Sherman Alexie sexual harassment allegations

NPR says 10 women in total have approached them with accusations against the author, who made a public apology last week for his ‘poor decisions’

(The Guardian, March 7, 2018)
(Re)Discovery: Navigating Collections and the Language of Erasure

Rachel E. Winston
The University of Texas at Austin
16 August 2018
@SisterArchivist
Cultural Diversity Competency (CDC) is the ability to function with awareness, knowledge, and interpersonal skill when engaging people of different backgrounds, assumptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Helen Wong Smith
Cultural Proficiency is the capability to shift cultural perspective and adapt behavior to cultural commonality and difference.

It requires: deep cultural self-awareness, deep understanding of the experiences of people from different cultural communities, and the ability to adapt--or bridge--across these various cultural differences.

DeEtta Jones
As an archivist...

Cultural collections...
Language/Description, Erasure, and Labor
MEMIN SUDABA EN AQUEL TRABAJO, PERO SU CONCIENCIA EXPERIMENTABA LA TRANQUILIDAD DEL DEBER CUMPLIDO.

DOS HORAS DESPUÉS, SUDANDO Y AGOTADO, MEMIN SE FUSO A CONTAR LO GANADO.

¿NO VA A COMPRA CHILITOS VERDES?

¡SESENTA PESOS! ¿QUE GUSTAZO LE VA A DAR A MI MA’ LINDA!

Y LLENO DE ALBOROTO, ECHÓ A CORRER HACIA SU CASA.

¡PREGUÑORA... ROLLITO DE QUIRE... AQUI LLEGA TU NIÑO ADORADO!

SÍNTESE A COMER QUE YA LE PREPARE ENCHILADAS. TRAIGO UN HAMBRE CANINA.

VIENE TODO SUDADO DE JUGAR, VAYA A DARSE UN BAÑO.

DE JUGAR NO, PREGUÑA... DE TRABAJAR, QUE ES DISTINTO.

NO SUELE, MI NIÑO. RECÜERDE QÉ ESTA NEGRA SE LA PASA MUY BRUJA.

PERO A MI MA’ LINDA LE TRAJERON LOS SANTOS REYES UN HUO ENCANTADOR QUE SABE TRABAR.

¿DE TRABAJAR ROMPIENDO ZAPATOS? PORQUE EN ESO NADIE GANA A MI NIÑO.

¿TRABAJAR MI NIÑO? ESE DÍA SE ACABA EL MUNDO!

PUES VE A DARTE TU CONFESADITA.
Uniform title: Memin Pinguin (Grupo Editorial Vid)
Title: Memin Pinguin.
Publication: México, D.F. : Grupo Editorial Vid

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<th>Location</th>
<th>Call No.</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
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<td>PN 6790 M64 M46</td>
<td>2005 NO.1-2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PN 6790 M64 M46</td>
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Description: 
- col. ill.; 20 cm.
Frequency: Weekly
Publication: 
- año 6, no. 190 (dic. 05 de 2005), [nueva ser.], año 1, no. 1 (dic. 05 de 2005)
Note: Description based on: Año 6, no. 287 (mar. 9 de 1962); title from cover.
Latest issue consulted: Año 1, no. 2 (dic. 12 de 2005).
Numbering peculiarity: Numbering irregularities; año numbering started again.
Subject: Comic books, strips, etc. -- Mexico -- Periodicals.
Blacks -- Mexico -- Comic books, strips, etc. -- Periodicals.
Grupo Editorial Vid.
Added author: Grupo Editorial Vid.
OCLC number: 39922168
I.L. Maduro Jr. Photographs, c.1904-1914

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Maduro, I.L.
Title: I.L. Maduro Jr. Photographs
Dates: c.1904-1914
Abstract: Photographic prints of Panama during the canal excavation.
OCLC Record No.: N/A
Extent: 99 prints
Language: English
Repository: Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin

Scope and Contents Note

Black-and-white postcard-type photographic prints showing Panama during the time of the construction of the canal, with scenes from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Each print is marked as copyrighted to I.L. Maduro, Jr. The photographs were removed from a black Eastman Kodak Co. album for preservation purposes; their original order was maintained in the number sequence. Numbers printed on the back of each print (e.g. "86B") are listed in brackets after the item description.

The collection was a gift to the Benson Collection by Harry H. Hughes of Austin, whose grandfather J.W. Underwood worked on the Canal. It includes a service pin awarded to Mr. Underwood "for two years continuous service on the Panama Canal," and employee tag #49971.

Index Terms

The I.L. Maduro Jr. Photographs are classified under the following **Subject Headings** in the University of Texas Libraries catalog:

- Panama Canal (Panama)--History--Pictorial works
- Panama--Description and travel--Photographs
Using Instruction as a Tool

- Empowered critical information consumers and archival information literacy skills
- Demonstrate Cultural Proficiency
- Process challenging or questionable content
- What can be made possible by centering historically marginalized communities?
Nigger/Negro/Colored/Afro-American/African American

Describing Blackness on a Mass Scale

Dorothy J. Berry
Houghton Library, Harvard University
Mass Aggregation has opened the doors to accessible, representative digital collections building
About umbrasearch.org

umbrasearch.org brings together more than 519,516 digitized materials from over 1,000 libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions from across the country.

Materials aggregated in Umbra Search represent:

- Those that have been collected by libraries, archives, and cultural heritage institutions
- The specific selections that have, to date, been digitized and made openly available online.
519,516 items from more than 1000 U.S. archives, libraries, and museums.

**Get Started**

Try some example searches to see what you can find in Umbra Search.

- **African American Firsts**: 1676 items
- **Video from the Civil Rights Movement**: 370 items
- **Underground Railroad (Advanced Search)**: 454 items
- **The Creation of the Niagara Movement**: 260 items
- **The Repertoire of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater**: 70 items

**Discover and Share with #UmbraSearch**

Exploring African American stories through digital projects by students, artists, and archivists.

- **Life and Times of Hattie O. Brown**
- **“A Poem for Scooter” by Andrea Jenkins**
- **Partner Feature: Temple University**
- **A Century of Black Hair**
- **Sign Up for the Newsletter**
17. Rosanna Wright, modeling African inspired clothing, at her clothing shop Bootstrings in Los Angeles, Calif., 1967

Keywords:

View @ UCLA, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library

18. [Shop floor display of hats at The Fair department store, ca. 1930: cellulose acetate photonegative, banquet camera format]

Scurlock Studio (Washington, D.C.)

Keywords:
African Americans: Clothing and Dress, Department Stores, Fair (Firm): Hats, Scurlock Studio (Washington, D.C.)

View @ Archives Center - NMAH

19. [Shop floor display of lingerie at The Fair department store, ca. 1930: cellulose acetate photonegative, banquet camera format]

Scurlock Studio (Washington, D.C.)

Keywords:
African Americans: Clothing and Dress, Department Stores, Fair (Firm): Scurlock Studio (Washington, D.C.)
Rosanna Wright, modeling African inspired clothing, at her clothing shop Bootstrings in Los Angeles, Calif., 1967

Description
Access to this collection is generously supported by Arcadia funds. AFRICAN FASHION—Rosanna Wright, left, manages Bootstrings dress shop, Operation Bootstrap project which features African fashions among Mod at 1038 W. Santa Barbara Ave. Gloria Bule works in shop.

Type: Image
Format: 1 photograph
Contributors: University of California, Los Angeles. — Library. — Dept. of Special Collections (repository)/Contributor.
Don (photographer)
Rights: copyrighted
View Original At: http://digital.library.ucla.edu/collections/AfricanArtifact. ucla.library/specialcollections/laterne1357

Record Contributed By
UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library

Record Harvested From
California Digital Library
Rosanna Wright, modeling African inspired clothing, at her clothing shop Bootstrings in Los Angeles, Calif., 1967

Description
Access to this collection is generously supported by Arcadia funds. AFRICAN FASHION--Rosanna Wright, left, manages Bootstrings dress shop, Operation Bootstrap project which features African fashions among Mod at 1038 W. Santa Barbara Ave. Gloria Bliie works in shop.

In collections
Los Angeles Times Photographs Collection
CLIR Digitization Grant

- Pulling from collections across UMN Archives and Special Collections
- Identifying hidden records related to African American history and creating an opportunity for discoverability and access
- Enhancing metadata and description, creating opportunities to rethink traditional methodology
- Almost 5,000 records identified, over 450,000 digitized to date
Whose History Gets Representation

- **Public Domain** — Rights Issues Lead to Over Representation of Controversial Materials

- **Collecting Practices** — Funding Has Traditionally Gone to Collections of Wealthy Men

- **Historical Realities** — The People Who Were Most Likely to Have Access to Paper/Photography/Literacy & Were Most Likely To Trust Institutions for Holding
Archival Practice Makes Metadata Complications

- **Description** - Titling Files Accurately But Providing Zero Context in Description

- **Neutrality** — Assumptions of Neutrality Create Biases in Favor of Historical Racism

- **Education/Diversity of Staff** — 65% female as of 2005, 85% Caucasian as of 2011
"Coon. Coon. Coon"

@ Library of Congress

Boswell, D. E. (Daniel E.)

Description

Keywords
- African Americans
- Children
- Discrimination
- Ethnic Stereotypes
- Insults
- Photographic Prints
- Prejudice
- Racism
- Songs

Related Content

Image
Created Date:
[1901]
Rights:
I guess you'd better hush-hush-hush: a coon slumber song

Manley, Julia Marion Whalley, Norma

Description

NINE LITTLE NIGGERS

"Two, four, six, eight, We ain't gonna integrate!"—School song, Central High School, Little Rock

Nine little niggers in Little Rock School?
Arkansas citizens start mob-rule.
Integration the White forbids,
"No little niggers sit with our kids!"

God's White chillun from the class-room run—
Nine little niggers? No, not one!
The Federal Court removed the ban—
Let little niggers in—if they can!

The Governor posted the National Guard,
The school-house doors were locked and barred,
But nine little niggers were smuggled in,
Then had to fly to save their skin.

But citizens who the law would thwart
Stand in contempt of the Federal Court,
And National Guard and State Police
In Little Rock failed to keep the peace,

And the President said to Little Rock,
"Arkansas won't put back the clock!"

Now Federal Troops move in to show
All God's chillun to school may go.
Deep South Governors urge a stand—
"Halt integration in Dixie land!"

WILL nine little niggers set off the spark?
The eyes of the world are on Little Rock, Ark.
Will citizens now include lynch law
In the sovereign rights of Arkansas?
Or will they heed the order terse,
"Lawless assemblies must disperse"?

Federal troops the law enforce—
All little niggers take the High School course,
Till Little Rock, Ark., accepts the view
That colored folk are citizens too.

SAGITTARIUS

Source: Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries
But now their parents think it time they should at school be taught;
So to instructors wondrous wise the girls and boys are brought.

VERSE 2

But now their parents think it time they should at school be taught; So to instructors wondrous wise the boys and girls are brought.
Mass Scale - Automated Standardization

- **Replicability** - Descriptive model that can be “copy and pasted” as much as possible

- **User Focus** - Considering descriptive mode that answer questions posed by ambiguous folder titles

- **Added Value** - Brief additions that do more than mark a folder as “containing African American material”

- **Aggregation** - Keeping in mind the wider aggregation model this project supports
Local Armed Service Associations. Bremerton, Washington: Negro, 1943-1946. (Box 55, Folder 37)

Subject
- National Board of the Young Men's Christian Associations. Armed Services Dept.
- National Board of the Young Men's Christian Associations. Army and Navy Dept.
- United States -- Armed Forces -- Military life.
- African American soldiers.
- Armed Forces -- African American troops.
Umbra Search, a First Step

Focused aggregation opens the door to reimagined collections in digital space, but mass digitization projects illustrate how we as a profession are at the beginning stages of describing “controversial materials” on a broad scale.
You Can’t Ask the Dead:

A Case Study on LGBTQIA+ Identities and Outness in Archival Description for Historical Collections

Kelly Bolding
Project Archivist, Americana Manuscript Collections
Princeton University Library
Description Audit

- Query existing finding aids to locate where description is doing harm and remediate
- Recover histories that have been obscured by description (or lack thereof)

(((en|(anti-?))?slave(s|d|ry?)?)|(manumi(t(ted)?|ssion))|(freed((wo)?m(a|e)n?)|(emancipat(ed|ion))|(abolition(ist|ism)?)|(run-aways?)))
Female Impersonation, Sexuality, & Homophobia in Vaudeville
How do we make early LGBTQIA+ histories discoverable without doing violence by involuntarily outing or incorrectly describing deceased creators and subjects in terms they would not have used to describe themselves?
“In a relationship of caring, we must balance our desire to capture histories that would otherwise be silenced in the archival record with the privacy, desires, and needs of the subjects of our records.”

Michelle Caswell & Marika Cifor on radical empathy, 2016
“Representing those in the past through our contemporary lenses is inherently vexing given our temporally and culturally specific language use and our current understandings of identity.”

K.J. Rawson, 2017
Strategies (1 of 2)

● Research terminology use in its original historical context
  ○ Learn how identities shift over time
  ○ Avoid anachronisms
  ○ Contextualize historically accurate terms that are now offensive

● Descriptive notes
  ○ Use terminology employed by the creator during their lifetime
  ○ Describe activities instead of naming identities when identities are ambiguous
  ○ Sites for “signaling”

example of thoughtful descriptive policies
Strategies (2 of 2)

- Umbrella subject terms/guides
  - Tag ambiguous collections as of interest to LGBTQIA+ researchers, instead of labeling the creator with a specific contemporary identity term
  - Use subject guides/reference interventions to bridge gaps in terminology over time

- Be transparent
  - Maintain old versions of finding aids
  - Provide feedback mechanisms
  - Be clear about what we (don’t) know
Bibliography


Dauphin, Mara. “‘A Bit of Woman in Every Man’: Creating Queer Community in Female Impersonation.” *Valley Humanities Review* (Spring 2012).


Jules, Bergis. “Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives.” NDSA Annual Meeting, November 9, 2016, Milwaukee, WI.


Dealing with Dealer Descriptions: Navigating Black and Asian Identities as Creators and Subjects in Purchased Manuscript Collections

Annie Tang @tanganniew
Processing Archivist
Johns Hopkins University
POWER TO THE PEOPLE
BLACK POWER
TO BLACK PEOPLE
YELLOW POWER
TO YELLOW PEOPLE
Collection of screenplays portraying Asian and Asian American characters

“1955-1965. There is a slow progressive move to accept interracial unions and to accept and understand Asian culture, and a particular effort towards acceptance of the Japanese.” -- 2016 original dealer description
(Mickey Rooney as Mr. Yunioshi in Breakfast at Tiffany’s, 1961)
“Portrait of three African-American children and a man at the Lewis Plantation in Brooksville, Florida, the man leaning over by a brick sign with his hand on his back and holding his hat in the other, while the children look on blankly, Florida.” (Postcard #1000)
Culturally aware questions to ask prior to (re)description:

1. Where did I get the information?
   Would donors, sellers, custodians, creators, subjects, or users agree with the source(s)? How does my cultural identity affect the description?

2. What system am I using?
   Does it reinforce white, male supremacy?

3. Who are my users?
   Who are my creators and subjects, and have they been marginalized/maligned in the historic record?

4. What format-specific details are there?
   Would my users, creators, or subjects agree with the chosen format details? The styling?

5. Does my description “accurately, appropriately, and respectfully” (Farnel, et al., “Decolonizing Description”) represent marginalized and underrepresented persons?

Black = Archival Cataloging and the Archival Sensibility, "Four Questions and Archival Sensibility" (Wisser, 39).
Blue = Follow-up questions
A) Rewrite this dealer description sentence as a biog-hist note statement (Hint: What’s wrong with this interpretation?):

“1935-1940. A more positive image [in cinema] is presented, with the intellectual Asian represented by Charlie Chan, Mr. Moto and Mr. Wong.”

B) What would you do in this situation?

A folder in the records of the University Archive was surfaced with the title “Student as Negro Incident.” Upon further examination, the materials in the folder referenced the use of Jerry Farber’s famous essay “The Student as Nigger” in a University of Minnesota classroom. The materials included editorials, letters to faculty, etc. It was unclear when these materials were processed, but at some point the folder was given the title “Student as Negro Incident,” presumably to avoid using the word “nigger” in the finding aid.

C) How would you improve upon this description?

You happen upon a legacy description:

Title: Bill of Sale for a Slave from Henry R. Bledsoe to Peter Loxente
Date: 1821 April 30

You find the original dealer description which includes the following: “A remarkable antebellum document detailing the sale transaction of an 11-year-old slave girl named Peggy from Henry R. Bledsoe of Tennessee to Peter Loxente of Feliciana Parish, Louisiana for $350. Little wear. Fine condition.”
B) The digital object created was renamed “Student as Nigger Incident,” with a description that mentioned that “folder originally titled “Student as Negro Incident,” along with a deeper description of the essay and the community reaction.

C) New description:

**Title:** Bill of Sale of Enslaved Girl "Peggy" from Henry R. Bledsoe, Tennessee, to Peter Loxente, Feliciana Parish, Louisiana  
**Date:** 1821 April 30  
**Scope and Content Note:** Manuscript bill of sale of an enslaved eleven-year-old girl for 350 dollars.
Culturally competent archival (re)description is the documenting of materials with an awareness of one’s own cultural identity as well as the cultural identities of donors, sellers, custodians, creators, subjects, and users. It includes the ability and willingness to continually learn and develop in applying those skills and knowledge in writing descriptive metadata.
Culturally competent archival (re)description also “accurately, appropriately, and respectfully” (Farnel, and et al.) represents marginalized and underrepresented persons and contexts through descriptive metadata practices, whether at the first point in processing, or in review, remediation, and reprocessing.
Recommendations

If you don't possess the time, resources, and staff for major programmatic review and redescription, here are some tips in the meantime:

- On-demand or as-you-go remediation.
- Ask reading room users to assess finding aids, guides, or catalog records as they work. Forms!
- Don't automatically ask your token [blank] coworker.
- Share the load.
- Discuss/train colleagues in cultural literacy,
- Do your due diligence. Research!
We don’t do this work in a vacuum.


