

# A Guide to Conscious Editing at Wilson Special Collections Library

Wilson Special Collections Library  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University Libraries  
First Edition  
2022



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# Introduction

As part of [The Reckoning Initiative](#) at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's University Libraries, librarians and archivists at the Wilson Special Collections Library are working to rewrite and refine the language used to describe the Library's extensive collections and records on the American South. The Library recognizes the enormous responsibility it has not only in collecting a diversity of voices and perspectives but also in composing, framing, and presenting descriptive information about collections.

*A Guide to Conscious Editing* at Wilson Special Collections Library creates guidelines for contextualizing collection descriptions to decenter whiteness and to center the voices of the silenced, marginalized, and unheard. Compiled and edited by the University Libraries' Conscious Editing Steering Committee (CESC), it reflects conversations and work that began in the Wilson Special Collections Technical Services department in 2017. Funded in part by a UNC University Libraries IDEA Action Grant, the Guide draws upon and expands this work. No modification of the collection materials is part of this work, only updates to the catalog records and finding aids that describe the materials for researchers to discover and access.

We approach this work with cultural humility. As library and information professionals and public historians, we understand the power of both language and visual information and the need to take deliberate care in creating and relaying both. Our goal is to engage in the continuous process of learning, critical self-reflection, and growth. We approach this work knowing that we carry biases as individuals and as staff members in a historically white institution and that our solutions might not be perfect (see our full statement on cultural humility and the values and vision that frame our work beginning on page 163).

Throughout this guide we acknowledge our fraught past and share tools we have used to address, rectify, and, in some cases, undo the harmful and oppressive language describing our collections. With this guide, we aim to capture the conscious editing work we have done, contextualize the decisions we have made, and provide guidance to those who are writing and editing descriptions. We view this guide not as a static or prescriptive document but rather as a living one that will evolve and change over time.

We hope that you will use *A Guide to Conscious Editing* to initiate conversations about ways that we can use language to better serve the individuals that use and the communities that are represented in our collections.

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*We recognize the land and sovereignty of Native and Indigenous nations in Chapel Hill, in North Carolina, in North America, and across the world.*

*The University of North Carolina sits on the land of the Eno, Shakori, Occaneechi, and Sissipahaw peoples. —[Anti-Racist Graduate Worker Collective](#)*

Indigenous epistemologies are alternative information structures that are shaped and guided by Indigenous histories, theories, philosophies, and ways of knowing.

## Background

Colonialism has shaped knowledge organization work by contributing to the marginalization and misrepresentation of American Indian and Indigenous peoples' materials in archives, especially those held by nontribal organizations. These power dynamics are evident through practices of reducing, or using pejorative terms, such as "reservation Indian" or "chief," to describe Indigenous people; misnaming, or using Western-oriented terms to describe Indigenous histories, experiences, and people; standardizing, or conflating all Indigenous peoples and societies as a homogenous "other"; whitewashing, or using euphemistic language, such as "Cherokee migration" to describe white violence and genocide of Indigenous peoples like the forced removal of people on the Trail of Tears; and implementing historical periodization, or dividing history into tidy Western-oriented periods, like "precontact" and "Indian removal."

Understanding how colonization works through these practices will help us to describe content accurately and remediate historically marginalized and underrepresented materials related to American Indian and Indigenous life, history, and culture.

## Context in the Wilson Special Collections Library

Colonialism resulted in the loss, suppression, and censorship of many Indigenous ways of life. However, there are currently more than 600 distinct tribes, bands, and nations within the political borders of the United States, each with its own history, culture, language, and epistemologies.

We acknowledge the ways in which colonialism has shaped knowledge organization work within the Library. Our collections have been unevenly described over nine decades by dozens of different individuals with varying levels of knowledge about the historical context of documents and collections, and the language acceptable at one point in time that is no longer acceptable has not been remediated.

## Why the Guideline Is Needed

We acknowledge the impacts that annihilation, discrimination, and exclusion have had on American Indian and Indigenous communities, traditional lifeways, and archival materials, and we aim to reflect the breadth and diversity of Indigenous thought and experience and the plurality of Indigenous knowledge systems in our archival materials.

We acknowledge that we often do not have access to the knowledge systems we aim to represent in our collections, and we recognize that Indigenous groups may have knowledge about the ways certain archival materials should be represented.

When non-tribal organizations have the power to name, they also have the power to make knowledge accessible and relatable to specific audiences. Without proper context and remediation, use of terminology that reduces, misnames, or misrepresents Indigenous topics can be harmful to our users and can hinder them from researching Indigenous histories, ultimately reflecting the library's inherent bias. To that end, we aim to center the voices, perspectives, and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples as often as possible in our materials.

## Remaining Questions

Would adding Indigenous land acknowledgment statements to description aid in discovery and access for Indigenous communities whose land is represented in the Library's collections?

What respectful and compassionate approaches can we take to collaborate with Indigenous communities represented in the Library's collections?

## Figure 1

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Stephen Beauregard Weeks Papers (collection number 00762)*

## Legacy Description

Stephen Beauregard Weeks (1865-1918) was a North Carolina educator and historian. He was [superintendent of an Indian school in Arizona](#). The collection contains papers and volumes related primarily to southern education and religion, compiled or created by Stephen B. Weeks, North Carolina educator and historian. Included are his correspondence about North Carolina historical matters, 1897-1913, and 75 items pertaining to a [dispute at an Indian school](#) in Arizona, 1903-1905, of which Weeks was superintendent.

## Conscious Editing

Stephen Beauregard Weeks (1865-1918) was a white North Carolina educator, historian, and [superintendent of San Carlos Boarding School, what was then called an “Indian school,” for Apache Indians in San Carlos, Arizona](#). The collection consists of personal, family, and professional correspondence, papers, diaries, and other volumes. Topics include the history of education in southern states, religion, a [dispute at the San Carlos Boarding School](#), North Carolina history and biography, the formation of the Southern Historical Association, southern Quakers, and slavery, and George Moses Horton, an African American poet who was enslaved in Chatham County, N.C., during the early 1800s.

The reductive use of the term “Indian School” is replaced with the full name of the school. The term “Indian School” is kept in the new description, but it is placed in quotation marks to indicate that this description is an outdated, Western-oriented historical term that does not accurately or respectfully describe Indigenous history and experience. The relevant Indigenous tribe associated with the school is also named in the remediated description.

## Figure 2

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Stephen Beaugard Weeks Papers (collection number 00762)*

### Legacy Description

Papers relating to the suspension and transfer of Miss Grace Fitzpatrick, a teacher, [from the San Carlos Boarding School](#), of which Weeks was superintendent.

### Conscious Editing

Correspondence from 1899-1907 documents Stephen B. Weeks' temporary move to the southwestern United States, during which he first resided in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and later worked as superintendent of the [San Carlos Boarding School for Apache Indians in Arizona](#). He returned to North Carolina in 1907. An invitation to the 1904 Congress of Indian Educators, newspaper clippings, and several letters indicate that [the school sought "Americanization" and "advancement" of Indigenous peoples, an educational approach that in 2020 is viewed as paternalistic and as an act of cultural colonialism...](#)

The presence of Indigenous history and experience is absent from the first description. The addition of "for Apache Indians in San Carlos, Arizona," names the Indigenous people represented in this collection. The new description also highlights Indigenous history and experience that can be viewed in these papers. Outdated, Western-oriented historical terms are highlighted in quotation marks and described as paternalistic and acts of cultural colonialism.

## Figure 3

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Preston Davie Collection (collection number 03406)*

### Legacy Description

Preston Davie of Louisville, Ky., and New York, N.Y., was a lawyer and collector of historical manuscripts and books chiefly relating to the history of the American South during the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods. The collection contains scattered and largely unrelated papers, many containing significant information on political and military affairs, others chiefly of interest as autographs, primarily relating to the South. The papers primarily address military activities during the American Revolutionary War and post-Revolutionary War politics. Other papers relate to French attempts at colonization in the 16th century, a letter of Admiral Gaspard de Coligny to Catherine de Medeci, documents of Charles IX, and an original grant from 1682 of 6,000 acres in South Carolina to John Smith, a sugar refiner in Surrey, England.

### Conscious Editing

The collection contains scattered documents assembled by white lawyer and historical manuscripts and autograph collector Preston Davie... Early documents dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries pertain to French, British, and Spanish colonies; the French and Indian War; land ownership in North Carolina and South Carolina; and [colonialism in relationship to the Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation, Creek Nation, Saponi Indian Tribe, and Tuscarora Nation](#). Several nineteenth-century items are related to the forced removal of people of the Cherokee Nation from their land and forced migration west on the Trail of Tears (1838-1839). [A few items document enslavement of African Americans in the American South...](#)

The remediated description corrects the omission of information about specific Indigenous nations whose histories are present in these papers. The Indigenous groups are named, and historical context is provided from the historical perspective of people from the Cherokee Nation.



## Figure 4

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Preston Davie Collection (collection number 03406)*

### Legacy Description

[Native American matters and Cherokee Nation Migration](#), 1 January 1799-10 February 1858 and undated

Letters and documents relating to Native American matters including subsistence contracts regarding Cherokee Nation Migration, 23 August 1838; three papers from 1838 related to claim of Bryan & Co., against the United States under contracts of 12 June 1838 and 27 June 1838, for subsistence of Cherokee Nation; and undated memorandums regarding distribution of funds to Cherokee Nation under treaty of 1835 and supplementary treaty of 1846.

### Conscious Editing

[Cherokee Nation](#), 1 January 1799-10 February 1858 and undated

Documents related to the [forced removal and forced migration of people of the Cherokee Nation from their land, the Trail of Tears](#) (1838-1839), and subsistence contracts and treaties (1835, 1846) with the United States government.

The Cherokee Nation is made the primary agent in the remediated description, and the historical background information provided centers on the perspectives of Indigenous peoples. The phrase “Native American matters” suggests that the experience of Indigenous groups can be seen as homogenous and has, therefore, been removed. The unqualified reference to “migration” is replaced with “forced removal and forced migration.” A reference to the “Trail of Tears,” a search term that was omitted in the legacy description, is added.

## Figure 5

# Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Durwood Barbour Collection of N.C. Postcards (collection number P0077)*

### Legacy Description

M. Durwood Barbour, a member of the 1952 class of the University of North Carolina and a resident of Raleigh, N.C., became interested in picture postcards as an offshoot from his hobby of collecting North Carolina bank notes and his appreciation for early photographic images of the state. Over the course of twenty-four years Barbour accumulated a collection of over 7,800 picture postcards. The Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards contains nearly 8,000 picture postcards collected by M. Durwood Barbour, 1950s-1980s. Included are views of almost every town and city in North Carolina. There are also postcards depicting scenes related to African American history, parades and public gatherings, agriculture and industry, military history, scenic views, public buildings...

### Conscious Editing

The collection assembled between the 1950s and 1980s by white alumnus of the University of North Carolina Marion Durwood Barbour (1929-2016) contains nearly 8,000 picture postcards with views of nearly every North Carolina city and town during the first half of the twentieth century...The collection also contains photographic postcards created by twentieth-century North Carolina photographers from across the state... Many postcards depicting African Americans, including agricultural laborers, prisoners on chain gangs, children, and elderly men and women, and postcards depicting members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in traditional costume including headdresses, illustrate racist stereotypes of the period. Some captions contain language that underline the racist undertones of the images.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee is surfaced and accurately named in the remediated description. The racist undertones and stereotypes seen in the postcards are named.

## Figure 6

### Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Durwood Barbour Collection of N.C. Postcards  
(collection number P0077)*

#### Legacy Description

On the Oconalufy River, Cherokee Indian  
Reservation Postcard  
1 image

Description: Real photo view of a [Cherokee man in traditional dress](#) standing in a boat.

The card also reads, “(copyright) Cline.” Creator/  
studio: Cline, W.M.

Publisher/creator/photographer: W.M. Cline Co.,  
Chattanooga, Tenn.

Location: [Cherokee Indian Reservation \(N.C.\)](#)

#### Conscious Editing

On the Oconalufy River, “[Cherokee Indian Reservation](#)” Postcard  
1 image

Description: Real photo view depicts a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, who is wearing traditional clothing and ceremonial dress.

....

Location: [Qualla Boundary \(N.C.\)](#)

Notes: [The Qualla Boundary](#) is the historic land of the Eastern Band of Cherokee. The territory is held as a federal land trust for the Band. [Qualla](#) is not a reservation.

Pejorative terms used in the past to describe Indigenous peoples and traditions are placed in quotation marks where they are part of a title. Other pejorative terms are removed, and instances of misnaming are corrected. Additional notes are provided to explain the correct terminology.

# Bibliography

## Centering Indigenous Epistemologies

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# Rectifying Ableist Language

The use of outdated, offensive, inaccurate, or inhumane terms to describe physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities and other health issues is ableist and harmful. Colloquial and nonliteral use of outdated terms once associated with mental health—"insane," "lunatic"—or with physical and intellectual disabilities—"crippled," "feeble"—is another form of ableist language. Used metaphorically to describe unrelated concepts, the current language of disability can also cause harm by reinforcing long-held ideas of what is normal or abnormal. Ableist language erases personhood by reducing an individual's identity to their disability, and it marginalizes individuals with disabilities by equating disability with abnormality.

## Why the Guideline is needed

The pervasive myth of "the normal" colors the way we represent peoples' experiences through language. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in four adults in the United States lives with a disability. What's more, disability is not a static state: people can move into (or in and out of) disability over the course of their lives.

Despite disability being a common experience, language in the descriptions and the collections themselves often simplifies the varied experience of disabilities to something that is a person's sole identity, something to be overcome, something abnormal, or something static (White, 2012). An example might include labeling someone as a "disabled person" rather than providing their name and indicating that they are a "person with a disability." In the latter, the disability is an additional characteristic rather than the defining identity.

Ableist language can also perpetuate harmful tropes of the "tragic" or "heroic" person with a disability who is "worthy" of charity (White, 2012) or admiration. Language used to depict an individual as admirable, brave, or pitiable because of their disability diminishes the agency, autonomy, and humanity of the person.

The myth of normalcy also links ableism with racism, as the same pseudoscience that sought to erroneously create biological races and to associate phenotypical characteristics with them also racialized disability by linking the concept of "abnormality" with the concept of inferior race. In "Crippling the Archives," Sara White shares an example: "Officials called Down Syndrome 'Mongolism' because they understood it to be the regression of Caucasians to the Mongoloid race" (White, 2012). Many such historic, pseudoscientific terms can still be found in our collections.

Using disabilities as metaphorical descriptions for something other than a disability decontextualizes, appropriates, and trivializes disability. When this occurs, the use of these words and concepts often connote negative meanings, which perpetuate ideas that people with disabilities

are abnormal, a deviation, less than, or “other” (Brilmyer, 2018; Thomas, 2019). Examples include labeling something or someone “crazy” or “insane” because it or they are different, incorrect, unexpected, stressful, or undesirable; calling something or someone “dumb” to connote a lack of intelligence or appropriateness; or saying something or someone was “crippled” to indicate that it or they was defeated or made ineffective.

## Guidelines

We update outdated, historical, and offensive terms to describe disabilities or people with disabilities. We look to national or international organizations that represent people with a particular disability to learn which terms to avoid and to use.

We ask living creators or subjects of collections affected by descriptions to provide their preferred language (Boyd, 2020; White, 2012).

Acknowledging that some communities choose identity-first language, we use person-centered or “people-first” language that “describes the person first and the disability second” (Boyd, 2020). An example of this is “person with a disability” rather than “disabled” or “disabled person.”

Recognizing that the language of disability will evolve, we consult existing style guides and guidelines for specific and current terminology, and we privilege guides from organizations that represent and serve people with disabilities. Existing guides include “[The Language of Disability](#)” from ACE DisAbility Network and “[Words to Describe People With Disability](#)” from People With Disability Australia.

We retain historic language in the official names of organizations, but we also provide access to and foreground the most current or well-known version of the name through free-text description and in some cases through the corporate name headings for the historic and current names. For example, we would retain the historic name “National Association for Retarded Children” when describing materials related to the organization when it was known by that name. In discussing the organization, we would indicate that the organization is now called the Arc of the United States and contextualize the name change. We also use current and person-centered terminology when describing the functions of the organization.

We avoid using words that describe disability metaphorically as modifiers for people and things not related to disability. For example, rather than “*crippled* by inflation, the business closed,” we might write “insolvent from inflation, the business closed.”

## Figure 7

# Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Cameron Family Papers (collection number 00133)*

## Legacy Description

### Biographical Note

Paul and Thomas had a number of tutors before they were sent away to school, including W. P. Mangum. [Finding a school suitable for Thomas, who was retarded](#), proved difficult. In 1813, he was sent to Lunenburg, Va., to attend his grandfather ... Of the eight children, only Paul and Margaret were healthy. [Thomas was either born mentally retarded or suffered a childhood illness that left him enfeebled](#). Although Thomas Cameron lived until 1870, he was dependent on his family throughout his adult life.

### Subseries 1.2.4.

...There are letters from John Rudd who ran a school in Elizabethtown, Conn., and from Captain Partridge about the progress of Paul's brother Thomas who also attended school. [Thomas was probably mentally retarded](#).

## Conscious Editing

### Biographical Note

Paul and Thomas had a number of tutors before they were sent away to school, including W. P. Mangum. [Finding a school suitable for Thomas, who had an intellectual disability, proved difficult](#). In 1813, he was sent to Lunenburg, Va., to attend his grandfather John Cameron's school. He was then sent to John Rudd's School in Elizabethtown, N.J., and finally, in 1820, to Captain Partridge's school in Norwich, Vt. ...

Of the eight children, only Paul and Margaret were healthy. Mary Ann, Rebecca, Jean, and Anne contracted tuberculosis. ... [Thomas Cameron lived until 1870, but he was dependent on his family throughout his adult life because of his intellectual disability...](#)

### Subseries 1.2.4.

Included are letters from Paul's instructors concerning his progress in school and his deportment; from John Rudd who ran a school in Elizabethtown, Conn.; and from Captain Partridge concerning [Paul's brother Thomas who had an intellectual disability](#).

Outdated and offensive language—"feeble-minded" and "mentally retarded"—has been replaced with contemporary and person-centered language: "Thomas, who had an 'intellectual disability.'" Disability should not be described as a weakness or deficit.

## Figure 8

### Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Wyche and Otey Family Papers (collection number 01608)*

#### Legacy Description

Other items are an 1849 clipping on “Blind Tom,” a slave who was considered an idiot but who had a great memory for sounds.

#### Conscious Editing

Other items are an 1849 clipping about Tom, an enslaved person who was thought to have intellectual disabilities and a great memory for sounds.

The offensive name given to an enslaved person is removed. “Enslaved person” is used instead of “slave” to highlight people’s humanity, not their condition in bondage. People-first language is used to emphasize that Tom was a person who had a disability; to call him an “idiot” is offensive and dehumanizing.



## Figure 9

# Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Bowman Gray Collection of First World War Photograph Albums and Scrapbooks (collection number 12024)*

## Conscious Editing

Albums and scrapbooks collected by Bowman Gray, Jr., of Winston-Salem, N.C., provide documentation of the First World War (1914-1918) through images created by photographers likely working for the French government or French Armée, through press coverage in clippings from the New York Times, and through printed items and ephemera reflecting the war effort on the American home front. Photograph albums contain more than 3000 captioned images taken in Europe and North Africa. Many images depict the destruction wrought by modern warfare and artillery on the villages and communes across France. The primary subject is the French Armée soldiers and officers on the front line in camps, cantonments, shelters, tunnels, and trenches before and after battles. Camp life is particularly well documented. Also pictured are colonial troops and cavalry including Spahis, Zouaves, Algerians, Moroccans, and Senegalese; troops from the countries comprising the Allies; German, Bulgarian, and Turk prisoners of war; nurses and doctors; refugees; civilians in towns, cities, schools, factories, and internment camps; wounded soldiers in the field and in hospitals; and [veterans who were disabled and described as “crippled” or “blinded” in the war](#). Loose images in the collection are photomechanical reproductions depicting French Armée officers and soldiers and colonial troops and cavalry.

Subject Heading

Disabled veterans--Photographs.

Offensive terms used in the past to describe disability, such as “crippled,” are placed in quotation marks. This keeps them as part of the historical record but indicates that they are no longer considered appropriate. Soldiers are instead described accurately as having disabilities. The addition of the LCSH aids discovery.

## Figure 10

# Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpts from the finding aid of the Elizabeth S. Martin Papers (collection number 01023)*

## Legacy Description

Elizabeth S. Martin (fl. 1841-1849) was a resident of Pocotaligo, S.C. Her cousin, Ellen Galt Martin (fl. 1841-1849), **lost her ability to hear and speak when she was four or five years old**. The collection contains letters to Elizabeth S. Martin from Ellen Galt Martin in New Orleans, La., concerning the latter's schooling, travels to the North, **attempted cures**, local events, and family news.

## Conscious Editing

The collection contains letters to Elizabeth S. Martin (active 1841-1849) of Pocotaligo, S.C., from her cousin, Ellen Galt Martin (active 1841-1849) of New Orleans, La. Ellen, who developed a **hearing impairment and speech disorder** around age 4 or 5, wrote about her schooling, travels to the North, **attempted cures for her deafness**, local events, and family news.

### Subject Headings

Deaf women--Louisiana--History--19th century.

Deaf--Education--Louisiana--History.

Deaf--Louisiana--History--19th century.

Deaf--Social life and customs--19th century.

Disability should not be described as a loss or deficit. Using people-first language, Ellen is seen first as a person and second as someone with a "hearing impairment and speech disorder," using contemporary terms to describe disability. The inclusion of relevant LCSH allows the viewer to connect this material to other material related to these topics and aids discovery.

## Figure 11

# Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Joseph S. Reynolds Papers (collection number 05060--z)*

### Legacy Description

After the war, Reynolds took a law degree from the University of Chicago and was admitted to the bar in 1866. He served in the Illinois state House of Representatives, 1867-1869, and in the state Senate, 1872-1874. In 1874, he served on a commission to establish a state school for mentally retarded children. On 31 January 1877, he married Mattie A. Gray, who died in 1890. When Reynolds died in 1911, he was living in Pasadena, Calif.

### Conscious Editing

After the war, Reynolds took a law degree from the University of Chicago and was admitted to the bar in 1866. He served in the Illinois state House of Representatives, 1867-1869, and in the state Senate, 1872-1874. In 1874, he served on a commission to establish a state school for children with intellectual disabilities. On 31 January 1877, he married Mattie A. Gray, who died in 1890. When Reynolds died in 1911, he was living in Pasadena, Calif.

In the original finding aid, the children were described as “feeble-minded” or “mentally retarded,” outdated and offensive terms that suggested weakness and deficit. The description was changed to “establish a state school for children with intellectual disabilities,” describing them as children first and with their disability as an additional characteristic.

## Figure 12

# Rectifying Ableist Language

*Image of James Bertney Barefoot shown on the North Carolina Digital Heritage website.*

## Legacy Description

Title: James Bertney Barefoot (died 1918)

Description:

County Merchant, Ingrams Township. Son of Python B. Barefoot and Eliza Jane Bryant. Ran country store in his home.

Subject (Images):

Portraits

Wheelchairs



## Conscious Editing

Title: James Bertney Barefoot (died 1918)

Description:

James Bertney Barefoot at a table, [sitting in a wheelchair](#). County Merchant, Ingrams Township. Son of Python B. Barefoot and Eliza Jane Bryant. Ran country store in his home.

Subject (Images):

Portraits

Wheelchairs

For this image of James Bertney Barefoot, the term “wheelchairs” is included as a subject but not as part of the description. In this remediation, Barefoot is still centered, but the description alludes more directly to the disability depicted in the photograph increasing the discoverability of disability in the historical

## Figure 13

### Rectifying Ableist Language

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Miscellaneous Papers, 1758–1989  
(Unit 61, 1868, 1871, and undated; collection number 00517)*

#### Legacy Description

Three letters, 6 December 1869, 25 April 1871, and undated from Zacharias W. Haynes of Raleigh, N.C., to his parents in Yadkin County, N.C., and one letter, 19 March 1868, from Haynes’s father John to his son. [Zacharias W. Haynes was a teacher at the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, apparently in charge of the Colored Department of the school for 20 years.](#) In the 1874 letter, Haynes briefly described conditions at the school; in the 1869 letter, he mentioned that the state owed him \$80.00, which he could not hope to collect before the next year since the treasury had “gone dry.” Other letters deal chiefly with family matters.

#### Subjects

Governor Morehead School (Raleigh, N.C.)  
North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind.

#### Conscious Editing

Three letters, 6 December 1869, 25 April 1871, and undated from Zacharias W. Haynes of Raleigh, N.C., to his parents in Yadkin County, N.C., and one letter, 19 March 1868, from Haynes’s father John to his son. [Zacharias W. Haynes was a teacher at the Governor Morehead School, which at the time was called the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind. Haynes was apparently in charge of the “Colored Department” of the school for 20 years.](#) In the 1874 letter, Haynes briefly described conditions at the school; in the 1869 letter, he mentioned that the state owed him \$80.00, which he could not hope to collect before the next year since the treasury had “gone dry.” Other letters deal chiefly with family matters.

#### Subjects

Governor Morehead School (Raleigh, N.C.)  
North Carolina Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind.

In this remediation, the current name of the school is foregrounded but connected to the historical name of the school at the time of the records described. Subject access is also provided for the most recent name of the school. “Colored Department” is placed in quotation marks to indicate that it is an outdated and pejorative term no longer in use.

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## Rectifying Ableist Language

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# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

The Library identifies Black, Latinx, and Asian people and peoples Indigenous to the Americas by the person's or the group's name when available. We use racial or ethnic group identifiers from trusted sources and when the identification of race is important to the context of an item or collection.

When using racial or ethnic group identifiers, the Library chooses those selected by the person identified. If the person is unavailable or deceased, the Library uses identifiers that would be acceptable by the communities most affected by the language of the description. Further, the Library is transparent about why a person or group of people are identified as having a particular racial or ethnic group identity in the absence of self-identification.

Additionally, we ask living persons about identities before applying the standardized vocabularies (e.g., subject "headings," name "authorities") that are used to collocate items about a person with items of other individuals who share similar or related racial and ethnic identities. If no appropriate vocabulary is found in any published vocabularies, we advocate for changes to published vocabularies and (until changes are implemented) display new, appropriate terms based on language that would be found acceptable by the communities most affected by it.

## Why the Guideline is needed

This guideline is needed to address historical and structural issues related to the history of white people having the power to name and identify Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous peoples.

This guideline is also needed to address the power of white people to obscure, eliminate, or misrepresent names and evidence of people who are not white.

Historically, white people in the United States have had exclusive power to name and misname and to identify and misidentify people not considered white within mainstream systems, such as archives. Examples include white colonialists naming Indigenous peoples "Indians" rather than using names of nations or language groups in Indigenous languages, white lawmakers creating the "one-drop" rule to identify and determine Blackness, and white Americans mistaking Asian and Latinx people for the wrong Asian or Latinx ethnicity or national group, especially during times of ethnic scapegoating and violence. In each case, the pan-racial identities originated by racist white pseudoscientists strip people of the ethnic and cultural identities they may prefer to use (Anderson et al., 2004). Further, white colonialists, lawmakers, and inhabitants of the United States also created a multitude of racial slurs used for every nonwhite racial group in the country as a manifestation of racism.

These inappropriate ways of identifying Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian people persist in library description. Archivists may not yet have recognized the problematic language supplied by creators of collections, donors of collections, and their predecessors, or they may not yet have updated the

language. Published, standardized language supplied by organizations like the Library of Congress (subject “headings” and name “authorities”) is widely adopted but often does not reflect the language communities would use to describe themselves. Further, language and identity are dynamic, prompting the need for continued awareness to revise description as language changes.

The lack of visibility and misrepresentation of Black, Latinx, Asian, or Indigenous people in archives, often referred to as archival silences, gaps, or symbolic annihilation (Caswell, 2016), are not always because of the complete absence of people of color in the historical record. These groups are documented within many of our collections, but archivists have omitted names and other details of people of color and mischaracterized the lived experiences of people who are not white in finding aids and other descriptions of special collections content. Further, the problem of access to names of people who are not white is perpetuated through provenance and rules for the creation of authority records (Antracoli & Rawdon, 2019).

## Remaining questions

One remaining question is how to effectively name and identify the thousands of people of color previously unnamed in our collections. Staff or crowdsourced transcription of documents is a possibility. What is the capacity of the Library to do this work, and could the resources provided be considered an example of a reparative action?

Another remaining question is what sources of vocabulary would we use when we cannot ask people to self-identify and when established vocabularies such as the Library of Congress are insufficient?



## Figure 14

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Sally Lucas Jean Papers (collection number 04290)*

### Legacy Description

This collection comprises the professional papers of Jean, pioneer public health educator. It includes correspondence with others in the profession, Jean's speeches and writings, and reports on public health and health education prepared by Jean as a consultant to business and professional groups in the United States, China, Japan, the Philippines, Belgium, Panama, and the Virgin Islands. [There is extensive material reflecting her work with American Indians, 1935; with Japanese-Americans at the Poston, Arizona, relocation center during World War II.](#)

### Conscious Editing

The professional papers of white public health educator Sally Lucas Jean include correspondence, speeches, writings, and reports on public health and health education that were prepared by Jean as a consultant in the United States, China, Japan, the Philippines, Belgium, Panama, and the Virgin Islands. Extensive materials, including photographs, document her work in New Mexico at the [Santa Fe Indian School and with people from the Navajo Nation](#). Also documented is her consultancy in Arizona at the Poston [concentration camp where American citizens and residents with Japanese ancestry were incarcerated and denied civil rights during the Second World War.](#)

The term "American Indians" obscures the name of the sovereign nation whose people are represented in the collection; it is replaced with "people from the Navaho Nation." The term "relocation center" euphemizes the unconstitutional incarceration of American citizens and residents during the Second World War. This has been replaced with the term "concentration camp." Brief historical information has been added to counteract the erasure and minimization of these events in the historical record.

## Figure 15

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Arthur Franklin Raper Papers (collection number 03966)*

### Legacy Description

Field notes, chiefly typescript, on Greene County, Ga., by Raper and his assistant Carolyn Blue. Raper's notes concern race relations, Negro education, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), and healthcare and include profiles of [white and African American community members](#). Of particular interest are Raper's notes on FSA clients that describe conflicts over taxes and rent and include transcriptions of confidential conversations between Raper and various clients. [Blue's notes chiefly describe white women in the community, particularly their treatment of domestic servants](#). Other topics addressed in Blue's field notes are [whites' suspicions about Raper's "subversive activities," children's racial etiquette, and racial inequalities in both education and the politics](#).

### Conscious Editing

Field notes, chiefly typescript, on Greene County, Ga., by Raper and his assistant Carolyn Blue, a white woman. Raper's notes [concern relations between Black and white community members, African American schools, the Farm Security Administration \(FSA\), and healthcare and include profiles of individual white and African American community members](#). Of particular interest are Raper's notes on FSA clients that describe conflicts over taxes and rent and include transcriptions of confidential conversations between Raper and various clients. Blue's notes chiefly describe white women in the community, particularly their treatment of domestic servants they employed most of whom were Black. [Other topics addressed in Blue's field notes are white community members' suspicions about Raper's "subversive activities" as a white civil rights activist, etiquette between Black and white children, and educational and political inequalities for Black and white community members](#). The file does not contain any consent agreements from the community members represented in the field notes.

## Figure 15 continued

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Arthur Franklin Raper Papers (collection number 03966)*

Carolyn Blue is identified as white; adding white identity, as well as that of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and peoples Indigenous to the Americas, results in a more equitable archive. It is also important to identify Blue as white to understand the perspective of the authors of the field notes. An explanation that Raper's so-called subversive activities were his actions as a white civil rights activist provides further context for understanding the viewpoint and content of this archive. Outdated terminology is replaced: "Negro education" becomes "African American school." The term "racial"—used in "racial etiquette" and "racial inequalities"—doesn't make it clear that the issues relate to both Black and white children. This is made explicit after conscious editing, making Black lives and experiences visible. Similarly, race relations are more precisely described in the remediated description as "relations between Black and white community members." As racial identifiers should be used as an adjective, not as a noun, "Whites" has been replaced by "white community members." Finally, the presence of Black historical actors in these field notes is further highlighted with the additional identification of domestic workers as being mostly Black and "Children" as being "Black and white children."

## Figure 16

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Arthur Franklin Raper Papers (collection number 03966)*

### Legacy Description

Chiefly materials about international agricultural programs run through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Foreign Service of the United States, and the International Cooperation Administration. Most items pertain to rural life and agriculture in Japan, with some materials concerning the Philippines and nations in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

... Other materials include reports, speeches, conference proceedings, and notes on rural and social trends in the United States. Of interest is a bulletin with proceedings from the 1950 Tuskegee Rural Life Conference titled “The Changing Status of the Negro in Southern Culture.” [An isolated handwritten document answers a question posed by a census taker working in Robeson Co., N.C. about the discrepancies with the birth and death rates of Indians and Negroes.](#)

### Conscious Editing

Chiefly materials about international agricultural programs run through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Foreign Service of the United States, and the International Cooperation Administration. Most items pertain to rural life and agriculture in Japan, with some materials concerning the Philippines and nations in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

... Other materials include reports, speeches, conference proceedings, and notes on rural and social trends in the United States. Of interest is a bulletin with proceedings from the 1950 Tuskegee Rural Life Conference titled “The Changing Status of the Negro in Southern Culture.” [An isolated handwritten document addresses a question posed by a census taker working in Robeson Co., N.C. about the birth and death rates of Lumbee Indians and Black people living in Robeson County, N.C.](#)

The term “Indians” is replaced with “Lumbee Indians” to provide an accurate and specific Indigenous identity. The outdated term “Negroes” is replaced with the contemporary term “Black people.”

## Figure 17

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Hester A. Davis Papers (collection number 05044)*

### Legacy Description

Hester A. Davis was a graduate student at Haverford College in 1954 and at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, 1955-1956. Along with other anthropology graduate students, Davis studied life on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in western North Carolina. She wrote her masters thesis, "Social Interaction and Kinship in Big Cove Community, Cherokee, N.C.," based on this field work. The collection includes papers, 1954-1964, that are chiefly field work notes, reports, and other materials from research conducted by Hester A. Davis and Haverford College students at the Big Cove community on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in Cherokee, N.C. Included are descriptions of the community's physical environment, demographics, social structure, economy, education, assistance programs, and everyday life.

### Conscious Editing

Hester A. Davis, white archeologist and anthropologist, attended graduate school at Haverford College in 1954 and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill from 1955 to 1956. Davis and other graduate students conducted field research at the Qualla Boundary (sometimes called the Cherokee Indian Reservation) for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in western North Carolina. She wrote her masters thesis, "Social Interaction and Kinship in Big Cove Community, Cherokee, N.C.," based on this fieldwork. The collection includes fieldwork notes, reports, and other materials from the research conducted by Hester A. Davis and Haverford College students at the Qualla Boundary near Cherokee, N.C. Included are the students' observations and descriptions of the community's physical environment, demographics, social structure, economy, education, assistance programs, and everyday life.

The misnaming of the Qualla Boundary as the "Cherokee Indian Reservation" is corrected, and the Indigenous people who live there are named, making them visible to researchers. The viewpoint of the documents is emphasized by adding that the observations and descriptions are those of the students and must therefore be interpreted through that lens. By labeling Hester A. Davis as white, we also know that her records are from a white and not an Indigenous perspective. Given that we underline the identities of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas in archival description, we must also identify the white historical actors. Adding white identity results in a more equitable archive.

## Figure 18

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Barbara Lau and Cedric Chatterley Collection on Cambodian and Montagnard Dega Immigrant Communities in Greensboro, N.C. (collection number 20460)*

## Conscious Editing

Photographs, color slides, audio and video recordings, and documentary project files comprise the bulk of the Lau and Chatterley Collection. Barbara A. Lau (1958-), a white documentarian and folklorist, and Cedric Chatterley (1956-), a white photographer, collaborated during the 1990s and early 2000s on exhibits, workshops, and publications about communities of Cambodian and Montagnard Dega refugees and immigrants in Greensboro, N.C. Audio and video recordings contain oral history interviews, Buddhist sermons and chanting, Khmer music and dance, and traditional ceremonies and celebrations including the Cambodian new year. Photographic materials depict members of the Greensboro communities, the Buddhist temples, and events such as the Khmer Traditional Dance and Music Workshop. Projects represented in the collection include “From Cambodia to Greensboro: Tracing the Journeys of New North Carolinians,” “The Original Children of Dega: Legends of the Montagnard-Dega People Remembered by the Refugee Communities of North Carolina,” and “The Third Boat: Negotiating Cambodian Identity in North Carolina.” Project files contain proposals, grant applications, budgets, research materials, field work, and transcriptions of oral history interviews.

The description of the national and ethnic identities of people depicted in the collection are taken from trusted sources (ideally self-identification), and the terms “refugees” and “immigrants” are used rather than the persistent, dehumanizing terminology used to describe people originally from other countries who live in the United States. The communities that are the subject of this collection are named in the collection title in addition to the white documentarian and photographer.

## Figure 19

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Paul Cuadros Photographic Collection (collection number P0088)*

### Legacy Description

Paul Cuadros was born in Ann Arbor, Mich., the third son of parents who immigrated from Peru. ... report on the impact of emerging Latino communities on the rural South. This resulted in the book *A Home on the Field: How One Championship Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America* (2006). The Paul Cuadros Photographic Collection is primarily composed of images related to the Latino immigrant community in central North Carolina, particularly in Siler City. They were taken when Cuadros was living there researching the Latino migration to the American South. The subjects of the images include the [living conditions of immigrants](#); poultry and agricultural workers, including injured poultry workers; social and community events such as quinceañeras and festivals; religious events, including a passion play; children in school, including a contentious meeting of the Siler City School Board in September 1999; and [anti-immigration rallies, including one led by David Duke](#) in February 2000 and the response to that rally. Also included are a few images from North Carolina locations outside Siler City and a few from outside North Carolina.

#### Subject Headings

Illegal aliens--North Carolina.  
Illegal aliens--Photographs.

### Conscious Editing

The collection of journalist and author Paul Cuadros contains images of central North Carolina and [Latinx immigrant communities](#) in and around Siler City that were taken by Cuadros while he conducted research for his 2006 book *A Home on the Field: How One Championship Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America*. [Images document community members including farmworkers, poultry plant workers, and school children; cultural and social events and celebrations such as quinceañeras and Fiesta Latina; church events such as a passion play; and public events including a September 1999 meeting of the Siler City School Board, a February 2000 anti-immigration rally led by white supremacist David Duke, and the local response rallies.](#) Cuadros also documented housing, hog farms, schools, churches, and migrant education programs.

#### Subject Headings

Central Americans--North Carolina--Photographs.  
Hispanic Americans--Photographs.  
Mexicans--North Carolina--Photographs.

## Figure 19 continued

# Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Paul Cuadros Photographic Collection (collection number P0088)*

This description uses the gender-neutral term “Latinx” to describe identity. The term “immigrant communities” is also used as a descriptor as opposed to less humane terminology that persists for describing people originally from other countries who live in the United States—some without documentation. Specific details about the community members and cultural traditions are provided to make their lived experience visible and center their humanity; they are not subjects being studied or observed. David Duke is labeled as a white supremacist to make perpetrators of harm visible and less of an innocuous presence in the historical record. The Library of Congress “Illegal aliens” subject headings were removed. The subject headings for “Central Americans,” “Mexicans,” and “Hispanic Americans” were used, which more humanely describes the people represented in the collection. Ideally and if known, specific nations would replace the general term “Central Americans.”



# Bibliography

## Rectifying the Erasure and Misrepresentation of People of Color

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# Creating Equitable Metadata and Inclusive Alt-text

This guideline addresses the creation and editing of descriptive metadata and alt-text for digitized historical photographs. Alt-text and descriptive metadata serve different purposes. However, both provide information about the content of an image, and both impact the discoverability of images online.

Alt-text is a concise description of an image or a short explanation of an image's function on a website. Inserted into the coding of a website or web page, alt-text improves web accessibility for people with visual impairments because the text is machine-readable. Alt-text is also read by search engine crawlers, which affects how an image can be discovered online.

Descriptive metadata provides information about an image's content—who or what is depicted—and about an image's context—what time and what place are depicted in an image and who took the picture. In addition to technical information about the original image and digitization processes, descriptive metadata schemas typically include fields for title, creator, geographic location, date, format, genre, collection, and repository. Interpretations and understandings of historical photographs depend on these descriptions, as does the images' discoverability.

Legacy description includes language, stylistic choices, and selected information that reflects the contexts, power structures, and inherent biases of those who created the images and of the archival creators at that time. This affects what information will be included or omitted and how people depicted in the images are identified. These descriptions can repeat language that reinforces biases, amplifies violence, and adds to existing trauma. As more digitized content becomes available online, the increased access can more broadly disseminate these harmful descriptions. By centering the names, lives, and experiences of white cisgender men while excluding or obscuring the identities of other individuals represented in the images, these legacy descriptions have also contributed to archival silences. This absence of information also affects discoverability and can perpetuate the marginalization of people when, for example, only white cisgender men are identified by proper names.

When we consciously edit legacy descriptions and write new descriptions for recent accessions or new digital surrogates, we should consider the access points that will lead researchers—not just academic researchers—to the digital images. Effective descriptive metadata enables researchers to discover, understand, and use the materials online. Inclusive and equitable description goes further by aiding in the interpretation of the materials and their descriptions by nonacademic audiences, and it begins with an acknowledgment of the power that the creators of the images and the descriptions have held.

When gender, race or ethnicity, and relationships are necessary points of access in descriptive metadata or alt-text, we should apply those demographic descriptions equitably. We should be mindful, too, of the loss of access points when we apply 21st-century demographic terminology to historical actors and remove contemporary historical terms that those actors likely used to describe or identify themselves and each other.

In 2017, Wilson Library began using “white” as an ethnic and racial identity for individuals and families, in addition to “Black,” “African American,” “Jewish,” and other familiar identity terms that we have used for decades in collection descriptions. To determine identity, we rely on self-identification; other information supplied to the repository by collection creators or sources; public records, press accounts, and secondary sources; and contextual information in the collection materials. Self-identification is favored above all else. Omissions of ethnic and racial identities in finding aids created or updated after August 2017 are an indication of insufficient information needed to make an educated guess or an individual’s preference for identity information to be excluded from a description.

Academic librarians created and compiled much of the Wilson Special Collections Library’s (Wilson Library) legacy description for an academic research audience. This choice of audience coupled with the choice to use an objective tone and voice influenced the content and style of the description. With the goals of objectivity and historical context, we often faithfully transcribed captions and titles from the historical images or legacy descriptions regardless of harmful, outdated, or inaccurate terminology in those descriptions. The unspoken assumption was that the academic research audience understood the historical context and could harness outdated language to answer their historical questions. Not all of our researchers are academics, and the stylistic decisions and word choices we made in centering an academic audience could alienate the communities whose members are represented in the materials.

In 2020, Wilson Library archivists began removing some harmful language and phrases, replacing them with “[racist slur].” Original titles remain on physical documents and digitized surrogates. The racial terms “Negro” or “colored” were maintained because the Library determined they provide historical context about the materials and their creators and facilitate the research process. However, it is important to be aware that some of these terms are offensive and outdated. A processing note describing the decisions to add or edit description is included in the finding aid for archival and manuscript collections in which that work has been performed.

Wilson Library adds or edits descriptive information according to the “Principles for Ethical Description in Special Collections Technical Services” in the *TS-Archival-Procedures-Manual*.

While ethical description alters original titles and descriptions that contain offensive and racist language, we recognize that these original titles can provide critical access points. Where offensive and harmful language are left unremediated, it is important to add information about historical and

structural issues that reflects the history of white people having the power to name and identify people of color and gender-nonconforming persons represented in the materials.

Alt-text is a requirement for digital images to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Historically in Wilson Library's Digital Production Center, where materials are scanned and uploaded to accessible content management systems, alt-text was auto-generated to match the existing container title. As a result, alt-text for a digitized image may be generated from description applying to the larger container rather than the item itself.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wilson Library piloted new descriptive processes in work-from-home projects, and we have started to build guidelines for correcting, editing, and adding alt-text. For historical photographs in archival collections, we have enhanced the description of an image by adding proper names of all individuals when known and information about gender, age, and racial or ethnic identity of individuals, including white people depicted in the images.

The practice of identifying historical actors with demographic information contrasts with descriptive practices at the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center (NCDHC). Those practices are guided by the principle that we should not "make assumptions about the individuals in the photograph when there is no contextual verification." We will likely never know how unidentified individuals depicted in historical photographs would describe themselves or with what gender they identified, but by using inclusive terminology, we are respectfully ensuring that we have not misinterpreted, and therefore misaligned, the people or events in our collections. Although different in approach, both practices of either including or excluding demographic information serve to make descriptions of digitized images more equitable, inclusive, and people centered.

Navigating the tensions between conscious language and access points for discovery means conscious editing will always be a work in process. The Library will revisit these choices periodically. To help understand concerns and find more inclusive solutions, the Library should also frequently and routinely invite and compensate feedback from communities represented in the collection and from researchers.

We recognize the significance of the language that we use and the ways that we frame narratives in description. We approach descriptive work with compassion and care for the people documented in our collections and for the people who use our collections and our descriptive resources. Describers should exercise empathy toward those who may have emotional ties to people documented in records by consciously choosing language that centers their humanity.

## Figure 20

# Creating Equitable Metadata and Inclusive Alt-text for Photographs

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Portrait Collection (collection number P0002)*

### Legacy Description

Smith, Millie Christine (1851-1912).  
Black-and-White Photographic Prints, Black-and-White Photographic Copy  
3 images

### Conscious Editing

[McKoy, Millie and Christine McKoy](#) (1851-1912).  
Black-and-White Photographic Prints, Printed Materials  
3 images

Millie McKoy and Christine McKoy (sometimes spelled McCoy) were [African American conjoined twins born to an enslaved family in Whiteville, N.C.](#) The sisters were often incorrectly identified by the surname “Smith,” instead of McKoy because [Smith was the name of the first white family that enslaved them during the first two decades of their lives.](#) The twins had several stage names including “Carolina Twins” and “Carolina Nightingales” that were used to publicize their appearances at a variety of venues around the United States of America and the world.

The legacy description misnames Millie and Christine McKoy, identifies them as a single person “MillieChristine,” centers the life of the white man who enslaved them, and provides no information about their lives. After conscious editing, information about their race and their condition as people who had been enslaved has been added to provide important context for understanding their lives. There is also a fuller description of their life experiences, and their stage names are provided. This aids discovery and makes them visible in the archives.

## Figure 21

# Creating Equitable Metadata and Inclusive Alt-text for Photographs

*Excerpts from the finding aid of the North Carolina County Photographic Collection (collection number P0001)*

## Legacy Description

Salisbury: Streets, circa 1890s-1950s



## Conscious Editing

Joe Ballard, local Black political leader, holds the reins of a cart driven by two oxen on a dirt road in Salisbury, N.C. Two white children are visible behind the cart.

circa 1900s

Format: Black and White Photograph Format: Image from publication

Caption: "Joe Ballard - Blacksmith, Politician, Philosopher."

The original title for this photograph is based solely on provenance, which hides the significance of what it portrays. The legacy description effectively excludes Black history from this record. The new description transcribes the caption to the photographs, which provides a name and details about Joe Ballard's life. The description also notes that he was a Black political leader.

## Figure 22a

# Creating Equitable Metadata and Inclusive Alt-text for Photographs

*Image of "Children in the Park, 1970s" shown on the North Carolina Digital Heritage website.*

### Legacy Description

Title: Children in the Park, 1970s

Alt-text tag generated by software:

[A group of children sitting on a bench](#)



### Conscious Editing

Title: Children in the Park, 1970s

Alt-text tag:

[A group of Black children sitting on playground equipment](#)

The alt-text tags for these photographs were originally generated by software. The remediated alt-text tag on Figure 22b addresses the default that whiteness is the norm, thus doesn't need to be labeled. Language that assigns gender, race, or ethnicity and relationships is often considered necessary as points of access and should be applied equitably.

## Figure 22b

# Creating Equitable Metadata and Inclusive Alt-text for Photographs

*Image of "Pee Dee Avenue Gang" shown on the North Carolina Digital Heritage website.*

### Legacy Description

Title: Pee Dee Avenue Gang

Alt-text tag generated by software:  
A group of children on bicycles

### Conscious Editing

Title: Pee Dee Avenue Gang

Alt-text tag:  
[A group of white children on tricycles](#)



The alt-text tags for these photographs were originally generated by software. The remediated alt-text tag on Figure 22b addresses the default that whiteness is the norm, thus doesn't need to be labeled. Language that assigns gender, race, or ethnicity and relationships is often considered necessary as points of access and should be applied equitably.



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# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

Collection materials in Wilson Library frequently contain racist and harmful language in the content and in the descriptive texts—such as titles and captions—that were provided by the creators or the collections' former owners. Racist language from original materials was then transcribed by librarians and archivists into the archival description, catalog records, and descriptive metadata attached to digital objects. This language can provide historical context, but it also repeats language that reinforces biases, amplifies violence, and adds to existing trauma.

In 2020, Wilson Library archivists began removing transcriptions of some harmful language and phrases, replacing them with the term “[racist slur].” Original titles remain on physical documents and digitized objects. The racial terms “Negro” or “colored” were retained because the Library determined they provide historical context about the materials and their creators and facilitate the research process. However, it is important to be aware that some of these terms are offensive and outdated. As this is an ongoing process, the Library will revisit these choices periodically. The Library also invites feedback from researchers to help us understand the issue and determine more inclusive solutions.

A processing note describing the decision to replace certain racist language and leave in other outdated and possibly offensive language is included in the finding aid for archival and manuscript collections in which that work has been performed. Wilson Library has also implemented content warnings to identify harmful content in collection materials; however, content warnings have not yet been systematically used to identify racist and harmful language. This guide is needed to address harmful language that researchers will encounter in our collections. Researchers should not be confronted with racist language without a content warning or other contextualization.

Repeating oppressive language in the description of materials could lead researchers to believe this language is acceptable and its violence endorsed by the Library. If the full value of these materials is to be realized, it is ethically imperative that the materials, and the issues they represent, are framed in a manner that provides the context for modern-day understanding and dialogue. They must illuminate rather than obfuscate historical context.

Processing notes clarify the history of racist language in library descriptions and decisions about when language is changed or maintained. These notes also create greater accessibility by removing language that might prevent people from achieving their research goals as a result of being confronted with violent language by surprise.

Wilson Library will periodically revisit decisions on language that requires removal, remediation, and contextualization. The Library also invites feedback from researchers to help us understand the issue and determine more inclusive solutions.

While ethical description alters original titles and text that contain offensive and racist language, we recognize that these original titles can provide access points. Where offensive and harmful language is left unremediated, it is important to add information about historical and structural issues reflecting on the history of white people having the power to name and identify people of color and persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, or gender nonconforming (LGBTQ+) represented in the materials.

## Figure 23

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Bayard Morgan Wootten Photographic Collection (collection number P0011)*

### Legacy Description

“D\*\*\*\*\* in Action”

Black-and-White

Oversize Photographic Print

13 3/4 x 10 5/8 in.

### Conscious Editing

African American children

Black-and-White

Oversize Photographic Print

13 3/4 x 10 5/8 in.

Processing note: In 2020, archivists removed the transcription of Bayard Wootten’s title and caption from the finding aid because it contained racial slurs.

An example of the decision by archivists in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill to remove transcriptions of titles and captions from finding aids because they contained racist slurs. This change is documented in a processing note. Original titles remain on physical documents and digitized access copies.

## Figure 24

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Alice Gerrard Collection (collection number 20006)*

### Legacy Description

Martin Marshall and Eula Marshall with Alice Gerrard and Gail Gillespie, recorded on 24-25 October 1992, in Laurel Fork, Va.

Audiocassette

Side A:

1. Stillhouse
2. Saro
- 3 N\*\*\*\* in the Woodpile
4. Old Joe Dobbins (2x)

### Conscious Editing

Martin Marshall and Eula Marshall with Alice Gerrard and Gail Gillespie, recorded on 24-25 October 1992, in Laurel Fork, Va.

Audiocassette

Side A:

1. Stillhouse
2. Saro
- 3 [racist slur] in the Woodpile
4. Old Joe Dobbins (2x)

An example of the decision by archivists in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill to replace racist slurs in transcriptions of titles and captions in finding aids with “[racist slur].” This change is documented in a processing note. Original titles remain on physical documents and digitized access copies.

## Figure 25

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Catalog record for Rubin, Bob. "Charlie for God!: A University of North Carolina student after Charlie Scott's last-second basket beat Davidson." Sport 49, no. 1 (Jan. 1970): 46-47, 89-90.*

### Legacy Description

"Charlie for God!" : a University of North Carolina student after Charlie Scott's last-second basket beat Davidson, 87-85 "It just proves n\*\*\*\*\* choke in the clutch...": the same student after North Carolina's 92-65 loss to Purdue five days later  
by Bob Rubin.  
Rubin, Bob  
New York : McFadden-Bartell Corp., c. 1969. Book  
Print

### Conscious Editing

"Charlie for God!" : a University of North Carolina student after Charlie Scott's last-second basket beat Davidson, 87-85  
by Bob Rubin.  
Rubin, Bob  
New York : McFadden-Bartell Corp., c. 1969. Book  
Print

The original title for "*Charlie for God!*" in the catalog record included a quote containing a racist slur. This has been removed in the remediated record.

## Figure 26

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the North Carolina Chapter of Delta Upsilon Fraternity Records (collection number 40151)*

### Legacy Description

Photograph Album, 1985-1986

Contains photographs of fraternity members in social settings.

### Conscious Editing

Photograph Album, 1985-1986

Contains photographs of fraternity members in social settings. [Includes images of white students wearing blackface](#) at what is likely a Halloween party.

The addition of a content warning about images of white students wearing blackface corrected the previous archival description that downplayed or silenced racist acts and images.

## Figure 27

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Hope Carter Photograph Album (collection number P0121)*

## Conscious Editing

Photograph album, 1947, probably belonging to white actor Hope Carter of Asheville, N.C. Photographs were taken during the filming of *Tap Roots*, in which Hope Carter was a stand-in for Susan Hayward. Movie production on location in Asheville vicinity and the Smoky Mountains. Album contains black-and-white and color snapshots, and some newspaper clippings related to filming. Topics include aspects of on-set movie production, such as scene construction. A majority of the images have hand-written captions. There are staged scenes of white actors in costume portraying Civil War soldiers and African American actors portraying enslaved people. [Also included are images of white actor Boris Karloff, in “red-face,” portraying a member of Choctaw Nation named Tishomingo.](#) Includes pictures of Hope Carter, Boris Karloff, Susan Hayward, and other 1940s era Hollywood actors.

This description brings the racist act of wearing “redface” to the surface and accurately names the person who was being dehumanized and their Indigenous identity.



## Figure 28

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Nace Brock Photographic Collection (collection number P0044)*

## Conscious Editing

Titles and descriptions provided on original enclosures, prints, and digitized materials from the collection come from original housing or related manuscript materials. [Some of these descriptions contain offensive and racist language. In 2020, archivists removed transcriptions of these titles and captions from the finding aid.](#)

An example of a processing note that describes the remediation work being conducted by archivists to remove offensive and racist language from transcriptions and titles in finding aids.

## Figure 29

# Addressing Racist Language in Transcribed Titles, Captions, and Other Descriptive Texts

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Thaddeus Ferree Papers (collection number 04258)*

## Conscious Editing

Updated in June 2020 to remove racist slurs. Titles and descriptions provided by creators of the collection are indicated with quotation marks. [Some of these original titles and descriptions contain harmful language.](#) In 2020, archivists removed transcriptions of the harmful portions of the titles from the finding aid and [replaced them with \[racist slur\].](#) [The original titles remain on the physical documents and digitized access copies.](#) [We have not removed racial terms “Negro” or “Colored” because we feel they provide important historical context](#) about the materials and who created them and they facilitate the research process. [We recognize that these terms also may cause harm and will periodically revisit our decision to include them.](#) [We recognize the complexity of this issue and welcome feedback on this decision at \[wilsonlibrary@unc.edu\]\(mailto:wilsonlibrary@unc.edu\).](#)

An example of a processing note that describes the remediation work being conducted by archivists to remove racist slurs from finding aids by using quotation marks or replacing words with “[racist slur].” Racial terms “Negro” or “colored” were maintained because the Library determined they provide historical context about the materials and their creators and facilitate the research process. There is an invitation to users to provide feedback, and the statement stresses that conscious editing is an iterative process.

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# Contextualizing Historically White Universities

Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) are institutions of higher learning that are direct by-products of systemic social and racial discrimination against African Americans and people of color in the United States.

## Background

The relationships between colonial slavery and colonial colleges—as well as the legacy of slavery in American institutions—are vast and deep and can be traced back to the transatlantic slave trade when higher education in the colonies expanded rapidly. College governors needed the fidelity and patronage of wealthy colonial families, including merchants and plantation owners, so that their institutions could sustain and survive. In the years before the American Revolution, money from slave traders and plantation owners transformed colleges into “playgrounds for wealthy boys and drew these institutions further into the service of the colonial elite” (Wilder, 2013, p. 11).

Colonial colleges also needed the fidelity of enslaved Black Americans, who erected buildings, cooked food, cleaned dormitories, and, ultimately, built their institutional wealth. Simultaneously, the enslavement of Africans, the social order of slavery, and the dispossession of Native civilizations were ideas that were cultivated, disseminated, and legitimated in college classrooms. The explicit function of the colonial university, or Historically White Universities, was to “operate within (and in the service to) the new colonial establishment” (Dancy, 2013, p. 182).

## Context in the Wilson Special Collections Library

This guideline is needed to address our own university’s history as a Historically White University and how our past has shaped the way we have used language to describe materials in our archives. By acknowledging all the ways in which universities, including our own, benefited from settler colonialism and anti-Blackness, we can begin to uncover—and attempt to remediate—histories of inclusion, exclusion, and degradation at our institution and in our collections. This guide seeks to correct the assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized.

HWCUs were not passive beneficiaries of slavery and conquest. Because Historically White Universities extracted labor from enslaved Black Americans and considered them property, they were complicit in producing and reproducing anti-Blackness.

One of the ways we can reckon with the histories of these institutions is by explicitly naming them “Historically White Universities” in our materials. Doing so provides necessary context when we attempt to identify additional content related to African Americans in our collections.

## Figure 30

# Contextualizing Historically White Universities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Kemp Plummer Battle Photograph Album of the University of North Carolina, circa 1894 (collection number P0100)*

## Legacy Description

The collection of white North Carolina State Treasurer and President of the University of North Carolina Kemp Plummer Battle (1831-1919), consists of a photographic album including black-and-white photographic prints depicting the town of Chapel Hill, N.C. The Kemp Plummer Battle Photograph Album of the University of North Carolina was owned by Battle and produced by “Foster, Artist and Photographer” of Richmond, Virginia. Also included are images of campus scenes, student organizations, and social events at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## Conscious Editing

Photograph album given to white North Carolina State Treasurer and President of the University of North Carolina Kemp Plummer Battle, as a gift given to him upon his retirement from the University. The album contains some of the earliest photographic views depicting campus known to exist. Subjects depicted in photographs include University of North Carolina buildings, grounds, faculty, staff, students, events, and [Black people at the historically white University](#). Of particular interest are the [images depicting three Black laborers; Ben Boothe, Eli Merritt, and Jerry Mason, who worked at the University for many years and interacted with Battle](#). A handwritten note states that the photographs in the album were taken in 1892, but the album contains materials from earlier in the nineteenth century including a composite image of the 1844 UNC faculty.

The remediated description surfaces information about the lives and identities of Black people in the history of UNC-Chapel Hill that was omitted from the legacy description. Explicitly naming UNC-Chapel Hill as an HWCU labels it as an institution of higher learning that is a direct by-product of systemic social and racial discrimination against African Americans and other people of color in the United States and thus provides necessary context for understanding campus history and the images in this album.

## Figure 31

# Contextualizing Historically White Universities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Collier Cobb Photographic Collection (collection number P0013)*

## Legacy Description

Collier Cobb (1862-1934) was chair of the Geology Department at the University of North Carolina, 1893-1934. His photography stemmed from his work in geology and other sciences, and he traveled extensively and used photography to document his interests. In the 1890s, Cobb built a darkroom in his Chapel Hill home, where he developed negatives and printed prints. The collection consists of photographs made by Collier Cobb in a variety of settings, including Chapel Hill and other North Carolina locations; the University of North Carolina; and Alaska, Canada, and Siberia. The collection is composed largely of glass plates (slides and negatives), as well as some photographic prints. Topics include buildings, grounds, faculty, staff, students, events, and [African Americans at the University of North Carolina](#); residences and churches in Chapel Hill, N.C.; logging in western North Carolina; North Carolina schools in Bertie, Columbus, Craven, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Harnett, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Onslow, Robeson, Sampson, and Wake counties; and [Eskimos and Eskimo life](#).

## Conscious Editing

Photographs made by white photographer Collier Cobb in a variety of settings during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, chiefly in Chapel Hill, N.C. and other locations in North Carolina. A majority of the images depict scenes on the campus of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, N.C. The collection is composed largely of glass plates (slides and negatives), as well as some photographic prints. Subjects depicted in photographs include University of North Carolina buildings, grounds, faculty, staff, students, events, and [Black people at the historically white university](#); residences and churches in Chapel Hill, N.C.; logging in western North Carolina; North Carolina schools in Bertie, Columbus, Craven, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Harnett, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Onslow, Robeson, Sampson, and Wake counties. Also included are some images depicting members of the [Indigenous communities of modern-day Alaska, Canada, and Siberia](#) which Cobb photographed during a trip to the area. [Cobb originally described people depicted in some images as “Eskimo\(s\)” and “Indian,” terms he likely misapplied.](#)

By explicitly naming UNC-Chapel Hill as a historically white university and Chapel Hill churches as white churches, we are providing necessary context for understanding what is depicted—or not—in the photographs. Accurate names are provided for the Indigenous people Collier photographed. The terms “Eskimo(s)” and “Indian” are placed in quotation marks to indicate that they are inaccurate and therefore harmful. Collier Cobb is labeled as white; adding white identity, as well as that of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and peoples Indigenous to the Americas, results in a more equitable archive.



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## Contextualizing Historically White Universities

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# Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

Throughout our country's history, violence against Black communities has been used as a tactic to continue the expansion of white supremacist culture and government control. Archival description that misrepresents, downplays, or silences white racial violence against Black communities is present in finding aids written decades ago. Its presence suggests endorsement by the Library and could mislead researchers to think that such description is historically accurate and acceptable.

UNC-Chapel Hill has a long history of collecting and describing materials sympathetic to white supremacists. In 1915, history professor J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, who studied at Columbia University under white supremacist William Archibald Dunning, began traveling throughout the South as part of a concerted effort to search for materials to establish "a great library of Southern human records," the Southern Historical Collection (SHC) at UNC-Chapel Hill. Hamilton's collections from socially and politically influential white families have contributed to important and wide-ranging scholarship on the American South, the institution of slavery, racism, and white supremacy movements. The problems lie not only with Hamilton's lopsided focus and the ubiquitous whiteness of the collections but also with the finding aids that describe these materials and still convey and amplify the language and point of view of the white elite and white supremacy.

The term "race riot" is the language of white supremacy. It is typically used to refer to white massacres of Black communities, such as the 1898 Wilmington (N.C.) massacre and coup d'état and the 1921 Tulsa (Okla.) massacre. It is intentionally misleading, meant to relieve white perpetrators of responsibility for their actions and to prevent Black survivors from seeking justice against them.

Used as a qualifier in the term "race riot," the word "race" implies that the riot's perpetrators and instigators were Black. That implication echoes and amplifies white supremacist narratives and tropes that paint Black people as dangerous, violent, and menacing threats to the peace.

The word "riot" implies spontaneity, with no planning. The violence committed by white supremacists against the Black populations in Wilmington was not spontaneous. For example, white supremacists planned the Wilmington coup d'état to install white government officials and to disenfranchise the Black population.

At Wilson Library, the term "race riot" is most likely to appear in collections documenting the 1898 Wilmington (N.C.) massacre and coup d'état, during which white supremacists murdered Black



citizens, overthrew an elected government, drove out opposition Black and white political leaders, and destroyed Black-owned property and businesses.

Murder by lynching was another horrific form of terrorism and vigilante violence that was perpetrated by whites against Black people during the South's Jim Crow era and then documented in the papers of white supremacists. Domestic terrorism, especially that committed by the Ku Klux Klan, is also evident in many of Wilson Library's collections from North Carolina and the American South.

References to murder by lynching and other forms of anti-Black violence are often minimal or absent altogether from legacy archival description. Such omissions whitewash the historical record, and minimalization normalizes anti-Black violence and contributes to the glorification of perpetrators like William Laurence Saunders, leader and organizer of the state's Ku Klux Klan after the American Civil War.

When identified, Wilson Library archivists remove language that mischaracterizes or silences incidents of white racial violence. We illuminate the violences and biases to clarify oppressive and racist distortions of the American South's history and culture. This work challenges and disrupts assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized.

## Figure 32

# Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Alfred M. Waddell Papers (collection number 00743)*

## Legacy Description

Alfred M. Waddell was an author, historian, lawyer, Confederate Army officer, United States Representative, 1871-1879, and mayor of Wilmington, N.C., 1898-1905. The collection includes correspondence, writings, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous papers of Alfred M. Waddell. The bulk of the collection, 1875-1900, consists of correspondence with national and state Democratic Party leaders and members of the Cameron family and other prominent North Carolina families, legal correspondence, manuscripts and clippings of writings and speeches of a religious, literary, political, or historical nature, genealogical research into the DeRosset, Waddell, Moore, and Myers families, and correspondence with other writers and historians. There are some papers related to Waddell's service in the Confederate Army during the Civil War with the 41st North Carolina Infantry Regiment, as well as his activities as mayor of [Wilmington, N.C., especially his involvement in the white supremacy campaign and Wilmington Race Riot of 1898](#)

## Conscious Editing

[Alfred M. Waddell Papers document the 1898 Wilmington massacre and coup, called "race riots" by its white supremacist supporters, that murdered Black citizens, overthrew elected government, drove opposition Black and white political leaders out of Wilmington, and destroyed Black-owned property and businesses. Waddell became mayor in the aftermath of the insurrection.](#) Other topics include national and state Democratic party politics; the Cameron family and other white politically and socially influential families in North Carolina; Waddell's service in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War with the 41st North Carolina Infantry Regiment; Waddell's law office; recipes; genealogical research into the DeRosset, Waddell, Moore, and Myers families; Gabrielle (DeRosset) Waddell and her involvement in United Daughters of the Confederacy and Colonial Dames; and commentary on art, architecture, religion, literature, politics, and history. Also included are a few colonial and early 19th century papers of the related DeRosset, Moore, Nash, and Waddell families of Hillsborough, N.C., and Wilmington, N.C. Materials include correspondence, writings, speeches, deeds, wills, legal papers, scrapbooks, notebooks, manuscripts, and clippings.

## Figure 32 continued

# Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Alfred M. Waddell Papers (collection number 00743)*

In the legacy description, the collection abstract highlights the career of Alfred M. Waddell, who became mayor of Wilmington, N.C., following the November 1898 massacre and coup d'état. The massacre and coup are instead made the primary focus in the remediated description to make this critical moment in history more visible. Whereas the first abstract is historically accurate and does mention Waddell's "involvement in the white supremacy campaign and Wilmington Race Riot of 1898," it does not make a clear connection between the two and refers to the event as a "race riot" instead of a "massacre" and "coup d'état" against the Black community and legitimately elected Black government officials. The term "race riot" is placed in brackets after conscious editing to indicate that this was a term in use in the past that is intentionally misleading, meant to relieve white perpetrators of responsibility for their actions and prevent Black victims from seeking justice against them. The consciously edited collection abstract still accurately describes Waddell's career and provides additional context about his role in the massacre/ coup d'état.

## Figure 33

# Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the William Laurence Saunders Papers (collection number 02658)*

### Legacy Description

William Laurence Saunders (1835-1891) of North Carolina was a lawyer; colonel of the 46th North Carolina Regiment, Confederate States of America; editor of the Colonial Records of North Carolina; secretary-treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina; and secretary of state of North Carolina, 1879-1891. The collection includes the papers of and collected by William Laurence Saunders, chiefly accumulated in the process of compiling and editing the Colonial Records of North Carolina. His papers include Civil War letters and papers pertaining to his Confederate Army service in North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina, and his participation in the battles for Roanoke Island, 1862...and correspondence relating to his historical research and other activities, [including two items pertaining to the Ku Klux Klan](#). Collected materials include legal papers; land grants; deeds; a slave sale document; indentures; a document appointing William R. Davie to lieutenant colonel commandant, 1787; letters to General Davie from George Washington regarding the appointment of regional officers from N.C., 1798-1799; contemporary copies of the legislative journals of North Carolina, 1749-1764...

### Conscious Editing

[The papers of white lawyer and North Carolina Ku Klux Klan leader and organizer](#), William Laurence Saunders (1835-1891), document his participation in the American Civil War as a colonel in the 46th North Carolina Regiment of the Confederate States of America Army (CSA); his tenure as secretary-treasurer of the University of North Carolina Board of Trustees; and his editorship of the Colonial Records of North Carolina. [Known items related to Saunders' Klan activities and white supremacist ideology are two letters dated 1871 and 1874 about the murders by lynching of African American men near Hillsborough, N.C., and the failure of an amnesty bill for Klan members to pass in the state legislature](#). Saunders' personal papers include his pocket diaries, correspondence, and bank books. Materials collected for his historical research include legal papers and contracts; a bill of sale for an enslaved person; letters of William R. Davie and North Carolina governor Thomas J. Jarvis; copies of North Carolina legislative journals and reports of the royal governors; records of the Episcopal School of North Carolina in Raleigh, N.C.; and manuscripts relating to the early history of North Carolina.

## Figure 33 continued

### Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the William Laurence Saunders Papers (collection number 02658)*

In the legacy description of the William Laurence Saunders Papers, the collection abstract highlights the career of William Laurence Saunders. Whereas this abstract is historically accurate, it downplays his role in upholding white supremacy, and the details of specific acts of racial violence are absent. The consciously edited collection abstract still accurately describes Saunders's career and provides additional context about his role in the murders of two Black men by lynching near Hillsborough, N.C.

## Figure 34

# Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the William Laurence Saunders Papers (collection number 02658)*

## Conscious Editing

Papers: 1870-1876

Includes two letters related to [white supremacist terrorism by the Ku Klux Klan for which William Saunders was the chief organizer in North Carolina](#) following the Civil War. In an unsigned letter addressed to Fred Strudwick and dated 27 November 1871, the [anonymous author accuses Strudwick of the murders by lynching of African American men near Hillsborough, N.C., and threatens violence against leaders and participants of the lynch mob including Col. Weeks, \[Henry Armand?\] London, and Saunders. The letter's author, who states "you hung our race" may have been African American.](#) In a 20 September 1874 letter addressed to Saunders, Joseph C. Webb discusses the results of the recent state election, pleased with the Democratic Party's gains but disappointed that [an amnesty law protecting Ku Klux Klan members did not pass because of dissenters including \[Josiah?\] Turner who had privately made remarks of "encouragement" to the Klan while denouncing the "Ku Klux and Leagues" in his newspaper.](#)

An example of a description that is explicit in its reference to racial violence, in this case letters—one probably by an African American person—that mention murder by lynching. Murder by lynching is also described at the folder level after conscious editing. This will aid discovery and act as a content warning for users.

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## Removing Euphemistic Language Describing White Racial Violence Against Black Communities

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# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

The Lost Cause is an interpretation of the American Civil War (1861–1865) that seeks to present the war, from the perspective of Confederates, in the best possible terms (Janney, n.d.).

The Lost Cause narrative creates, glorifies, and romanticizes the antebellum South and the Confederate war effort contrary to the historical record. This Lost Cause mythology promotes nostalgia for the Confederacy while downplaying the inhumane treatment of enslaved people and the role slavery played as the primary cause of the American Civil War.

Created and perpetuated by organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and Sons of Confederate Veterans, this narrative was accepted by many white Americans, spreading throughout and beyond the American South. Beginning in the 1880s and continuing into the mid-20th century, the UDC raised money to build statues to commemorate the Confederate cause throughout the United States, including in states that did not secede from the Union. These statues included the Confederate monument commonly known as *Silent Sam*, erected on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus in 1913 and torn down by activists in 2018.

The Lost Cause has lost much of its academic support but continues to be a part of how the American Civil War is remembered in American popular culture and commemorated in the American South and beyond. Depictions of the Lost Cause in popular culture include the movies *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and flags, clothing, and other products using the design of the battle flag of the Army of Northern Virginia (commonly referred to as “the Confederate Flag,” despite it never being recognized as an official flag of the Confederate States of America). White supremacists and white nationalist groups across the country and globe continue to use Lost Cause iconography to further their racist agenda and terrorism. On 6 January 2021, insurrectionists stormed the United States Capitol. Broadcasting their white supremacist motives, one terrorist carried a large Confederate battle flag through the Capitol building.

Many collections housed in Wilson Library contain description that glorifies white families while largely ignoring the people those families enslaved. Such description is consistent with former collecting practices to document prominent white families. Whereas Wilson Library’s collections have contributed to important scholarship about prominent white families throughout North Carolina and the rest of the American South, many of the finding aids describing these materials contain language consistent with Lost Cause mythology. These finding aids laud the accomplishments of white slaveholding families while not emphasizing the lives of the enslaved people generating the families’ wealth, and they do not challenge white supremacy.

This guide is needed to contextualize historical collections available in the Wilson Library, particularly the SHC and North Carolina Collection, correcting the assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized.



Archival description supporting Lost Cause mythology is present in many finding aids written decades ago. Archival description endorsing Lost Cause mythology suggests endorsement by the Library and could mislead researchers to think that such ideas are acceptable and historically accurate.

The continued presence of Lost Cause mythology in popular culture normalizes the idea that the Confederacy should be romanticized and glorified as "southern heritage," despite its brief four-year existence (1861–1865).

## Figure 35

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Julian Shakespeare Carr Papers (collection number 00141)*

## Legacy Description

Julian Shakespeare Carr (1845-1924) of Chapel Hill and Durham, N.C., was a manufacturer of tobacco products with interests in a wide range of other businesses, including banking and textiles. Carr was also active in the Methodist Church, the Democratic Party, and several Confederate veterans' organizations, including the North Carolina branch of the United Confederate Veterans, which he served as commander. He was also a strong supporter of various institutions of higher education in the state. The collection includes letters, telegrams, printed announcements, programs, and pamphlets, business and legal documents, maps, and newspaper clippings pertaining to Carr's business and personal affairs....Also included are printed and manuscript addresses and Sunday School lessons given by Carr. *Of special note is a series of speeches discussing the race problem in North Carolina and throughout the South. One address, 2 June 1913, given at the dedication of the monument later known as "Silent Sam" on the University of North Carolina campus. Business topics are also represented.*

## Conscious Editing

The papers of white businessman and public figure Julian Shakespeare Carr (1845-1924) of Chapel Hill and Durham, N.C., document his financial interests in tobacco, textiles, and banking; affiliations with the Methodist Church, the Democratic Party in North Carolina, and organizations commemorating the Confederacy; and philanthropic support of institutions of higher education, particularly the University of North Carolina (UNC). Papers include letters, printed items, business records, legal documents, diaries, photographs, lessons for Sunday school, and addresses written and delivered by Carr. *The rhetoric in many addresses reflects Carr's positions on what he and his contemporaries called "the race problem." In keeping with white supremacy movements in North Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century, Carr defended the institution of slavery, claiming it had been beneficial to the enslaved, and argued for denying full citizenship rights to African Americans. Included are Carr's 1899 speech supporting an amendment to the North Carolina constitution that disenfranchised African Americans and his address at the 1913 dedication of the Confederate monument later known as "Silent Sam" on the UNC campus.*

## Figure 35 continued

### Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Julian Shakespeare Carr Papers (collection number 00141)*

Carr's white supremacist beliefs and actions are downplayed in the first description. The term "race problem" perpetuates Lost Cause mythology. In this context, Carr's address at the dedication of the Confederate monument later known as Silent Sam is mentioned with no details. Removing language such as "race problem" helps to mitigate oppressive and racist distortions of the American South's history and culture. In the remediated description, details of Carr's white supremacist views and belief in the Lost Cause are provided. Correctly contextualizing historical collections enables people to discover larger truths, not the fiction of an imagined and mythologized Old South.

## Figure 36

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Julian Shakespeare Carr Papers (collection number 00141)*

## Legacy Description

Series 2. Sunday School Lessons and Addresses, 1896-1923 and undated.

About 125 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Printed and manuscript addresses and Sunday School lessons given by Carr. The addresses primarily derive from his interest in the Civil War and in Confederate Veterans, and from his prominence in the Methodist Church. [Of special note is a series of speeches discussing the race problem in North Carolina and throughout the South. Business topics are also represented.](#)

Subseries 2.2. Addresses, 1896-1923 and undated.

About 125 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Folder 29 Addresses, 1923

## Conscious Editing

Subseries 2.2. Addresses, 1896-1923 and undated.

About 125 items.

Arrangement: chronological.

Speeches written and delivered by Carr for various occasions, including dedications of Confederate monuments, meetings of Confederate veteran and commemoration groups such as chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, school commencements, and convocations such as University Day at the University of North Carolina. In his oratory, Carr often extolled what he viewed as the virtues of southern white women during the Civil War, the bravery of Confederate soldiers, the gallantry of Confederate generals especially Robert E. Lee, and the cause of states' rights. In addressing what contemporaries called "the race problem" or "the Negro problem," Carr's rhetoric reflected the era's white supremacy movements in North Carolina. For example, he argued for the disenfranchisement of African Americans.

Folder 29 Addresses, 1923

Includes a 1923 address to the Confederate Veterans Association in New York in which Carr asserted the false Lost Cause narrative that the conflict that started the Civil War was not slavery, but a different interpretation of the Constitution with regard to states' rights.

## Figure 36 continued

### Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Julian Shakespeare Carr Papers (collection number 00141)*

The legacy description provides details of addresses given by Carr at Sunday School on the “race problem,” a term that masks white supremacist attitudes and perpetuates Lost Cause mythology. After conscious editing, specific elements of his rhetoric that reflected the era’s white supremacist movements are described, which provides context for a better understanding of this collection.

## Figure 37

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Maunsell White Papers (collection number 02234)*

## Legacy Description

Maunsell White was a New Orleans commission merchant and Plaquemines Parish, La., planter. His son, Maunsell White, Jr. (fl. 1835-1883), was also a merchant and planter. Chiefly correspondence (some on microfilm only) about growing and marketing cotton, sugar, and other crops, mostly 1842-1850, and a set of plantation journals, 1852-1883, documenting the operation of the Whites' plantations, Deer Range and Junior Place. Also included are one letter from and one letter to Andrew Jackson; a letter from Zachary Taylor; letters from Maunsell White to his son while the latter was attending the University of Virginia, 1850-1851; a memorandum book of expenses in New Orleans, New York, and Philadelphia, 1802-1804; and two autograph books, one of which is from Saint Joseph's College in Louisiana, circa 1846, and the other from the University of Virginia, 1850-1851.

## Conscious Editing

The papers of Irish immigrant Maunsell White (1783-1863) document the enslavement of more than 230 people on White's sugar plantations in Plaquemines Parish, La., including Deer Range and Junior Place, and in Pointe Coupée Parish, La.; sugar cultivation and production; and White's work as a commission merchant and cotton factor in New Orleans, La. The collection contains business correspondence chiefly about marketing cotton, sugar, and other cash crops; letters to his son Maunsell White while the younger White attended the University of Virginia from 1850 to 1851; financial memoranda and records; autograph books; and plantation journals. In the journals, White and his surrogates recorded weather; daily operations; household activities; planting instructions; agricultural production and experimentation; job assignments; distribution of clothing and other necessities to enslaved people; and births, deaths, and marriages in the enslaved communities on his properties. Included in the correspondence is a letter dated 28 February 1842 from Andrew Jackson, whom White first encountered when he served as a militia commander during the Battle of New Orleans in 1814. Portions of this collection are available only on microfilm.

## Figure 37 continued

### Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Maunsel White Papers (collection number 02234)*

The use of the word “planter” to describe plantation owners and enslavers obfuscates the reality that they depended on enslaved labor for their wealth and power. Such language reinforces biases and is removed through conscious editing, thus correcting the assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized. The remediated description elevates details about the lives of enslaved people contained within this collection.

## Figure 38

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Maunsel White Papers (collection number 02234)*

### Legacy Description

Plantation records and account book, 1833-1843  
This book relates to the Deer Range sugar plantation in Plaquemines Parish, La., and supplements records...Most of the entries are by overseer A.B. Stoddard, who was paid at the rate of \$1000 per annum and who died in the summer of 1843. The only entries made by White appear to be those during rolling season, 1839-1840, when he made periodic visits to the plantation between 11 October 1839 and 27 January 1840. The book confirms evidence already available in the collection that **White was a particularly benevolent slaveowner emphasizing rewards and incentives rather than punishment in slave management. The volume contains a series of accounts with slaves that show that White paid his hands for Sunday work and extra assignments such as digging stumps.**

### Conscious Editing

Plantation records and account book, 1833-1843  
This account book for the Deer Range sugar plantation in Plaquemines Parish, La., supplements the records...Most entries were made by **white overseer** A. B. Stoddard, who was paid at the rate of \$1,000 per annum...The volume contains information about **enslaved people including lists with names of the enslaved and occasional indications of specific occupations; records of marriages in the enslaved community from 1837 to 1842; work assignments; accounts of payments for Sunday work and extra assignments**, such as digging stumps; distribution records for clothing, mosquito nets, sheets, and socks; White's expenses for clothing distributed to enslaved people (e.g., \$670.00 in October 1836). The distribution lists show the cost of each item and the total costs of clothing for enslaved men and enslaved women.

The original description includes the racist trope of a benevolent slave owner and even highlights that White "paid his hands for Sunday work and extra assignments," as though this deserves special recognition. The remediated description removes this language, which promotes Lost Cause mythology representations and perpetuates oppressive and racist distortions of the American South's history and culture. After conscious editing, detailed information about the enslaved people whose lives were recorded in the plantation records and account books are listed to center and surface Black lives in this collection and aid discovery.



## Figure 39

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

### Legacy Description

Includes letter, August 1863, from Daniel B. Hanes [?], an enslaved person, who reported on the health of other enslaved people, *expressed gratefulness to his master for removing him from an unsatisfactory work arrangement where he had been hired out,* and asked how he would go about sending money.

### Conscious Editing

Includes a letter dated August 1863 from Daniel D. Haines, a Black man enslaved by the white DeRosset family in Wilmington, N.C. In his letter, *Haines reported on the health of other enslaved people including Julian and William and discussed his previous working conditions after being trafficked or “hired out.”* He also requested information about sending money to the DeRossets and requested that letters be sent via an agent of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad.

The racist trope of the “grateful slave” is removed after conscious editing to avoid perpetuating Lost Cause mythology about slavery. The use of quotation marks makes viewers aware that “hired out” is a misleading term that downplays what enslaved people had to endure; trafficked is more accurate.

## Figure 40

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

## Legacy Description

Folder 54 includes a letter, 10 June 1862, from William Henry Thurber, an enslaved person in Wilmington, N.C., to refugee DeRosset family members, in which he [sent good wishes](#) and greetings to family and expressed his faith in God.

Folder 55 includes two letters, 3 October 1862 and 23 October 1862, by William Henry Thurber, and one, 3 October 1863, by Bella DeRosset, who also was an enslaved person writing from Wilmington, N.C., to [refugee DeRosset family members](#). Thurber and DeRosset [sent good wishes](#) and reported on a spreading yellow fever epidemic and [mistreatment of Kitty Ann, an enslaved woman who had been hired out](#).

Folder 56 includes a letter, 25 March 1863, from “Jimmy,” an [enslaved person hired out to work in an office](#), to his mistress, “Miss Lizzie,” in which he reported that he had [been granted permission to marry](#) and asked for money so that he might get something to wear at the wedding.

## Conscious Editing

In letters dated 10 June 1862, 3 October 1862, 23 October 1862, and 28 October 1862, William Henry Thurber (active 1862) [writes about his own poor health, yellow fever outbreaks, visits by doctors from Charleston, S.C., and the health of George, Kitty, Benny, Bella, and Wellington](#), who were also enslaved in Wilmington. [On behalf of Kitty Ann, he asks that she not be “put with” \(trafficked\) to the same man who had worked her “all most to death.”](#) He also requests that a [message of love be passed to his mother, who was enslaved in Hillsborough](#) and expresses his Christian faith and the need for prayers. See folders 54 and 55.

In a letter dated 3 October 1862, Bella DeRosset (active 1781-1862) reports on [the health of Juliet, Kitty Ann, Joseph, Jimmie, Julia, and George, who were also enslaved in Wilmington, N.C., and sends messages to Fanny, Peggy, and Marriah, who were enslaved in Hillsborough, N.C.](#) She refers to yellow fever outbreaks in Wilmington, scarcity of provisions, and her Christian faith. See folder 55.

In a letter dated 25 March 1863, Jimmey (active 1863) requests money to purchase clothing suitable for his upcoming wedding after he had received permission to get married. He also [reports on the health of Bella and Julia, who were also enslaved in Wilmington, N.C.](#) See folder 56.

## Figure 40 continued

### Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

The legacy description highlights the “good wishes” that enslaved people had sent in their letters to their enslavers, members of the DeRosset family. This is likely an expected formality and not an indication of genuine feelings. After conscious editing, reports of maltreatment of Kitty Ann by the man that she had been trafficked to are no longer downplayed; “mistreatment” is replaced with a quote from the letter that states that Kitty Ann was worked “all most to death,” thereby correcting the silencing of racial violence in archival description. All the names of Black and enslaved people who wrote or are represented in the letters are provided to surface their lives.

## Figure 41

### Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Webb Family of Hillsborough (N.C.) Papers  
(collection number 05532)*

#### Conscious Editing

Reminiscence, undated circa early 1900s.

By an unnamed white female author who was a child in the late antebellum and Civil War era. In keeping with the [Lost Cause and white supremacist framing of slavery prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century South](#), she characterized the enslaved people her family owned as contented and loyal servants.

The historical background and context provided in this description expose the racist trope of the “contented and loyal servants” to clarify oppressive and racist distortions of the American South’s history and culture.

## Figure 42

# Contextualizing Lost Cause Mythology

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Elizabeth Lumpkin Glenn Papers (collection number 05804)*

## Conscious Editing

The Elizabeth Lumpkin Glenn Papers, 1880s-1960s, document the experiences and perspectives of a [white woman who lived in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, and who was a daughter, sister, wife, and mother in a family actively engaged in preservation of the “Lost Cause” mythology about the American Civil War](#). Elizabeth Lumpkin Glenn was a [lifelong participant in Confederate memory organizations and activities](#); she also wrote fiction and non-fiction. Materials include personal and family correspondence, writings, photographs, scrapbooks, printed materials, newspaper clippings, and other materials.

Through conscious editing, this collection is contextualized as representing the outlook and perspectives of a person who believed in and perpetuated Lost Cause mythology. By providing this context, readers can understand the content of this collection through a lens that helps to mitigate oppressive and racist distortions of the American South’s history and culture.

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# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

Collections from the 18th and 19th centuries documenting the enslavement of thousands of Black people were donated by white people in the mid to late 20th century and then named, organized, and described to center the white individual or family who claimed people as property. The centering of the white enslavers marginalized the documentation of the people who were enslaved, documentation typically not available anywhere else.

By reframing to center Black people documented in “family papers” of white people, we are striving for equitable description and opportunities for those looking for documentation on Black lives and for Black descendants to find ancestors in the historic record.

Enslaved people were not properly identified in records; they were often listed as property in deeds and were only recorded by first name and surname after slavery was abolished, making it difficult for African Americans to identify their ancestors in the historic record.

Wilson Library’s SHC holds hundreds of archival record groups that document Black people who were enslaved on plantations and farms; at mills, fisheries, railroads, and ports; at colleges and universities, including UNC-Chapel Hill; and in towns and cities across the American South during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The collections include documents created by the enslavers to manage their assets: the people they claimed as property. The enslavers often recorded information, including names, ages, birth dates, death dates, occupations, illnesses, and acts of resistance that cannot be found anywhere else in public records.

The documents are there to be mined by Black genealogists and family historians but are obscured by description focused on white people and by the organizing principle of provenance that centered white people.

Most plantation collections were acquired as donations from the direct descendants of the plantation owners: the wealthy elite white people who had enslaved Black people in the 18th and 19th centuries, building their wealth from forced labor in the production of cash crops—cotton, rice, tobacco, and sugarcane.

The white historians and archivists who acquired these collections with the vision of creating a “great library of the American South” followed the archival principle of provenance and created separate collections for each group of records received from the donors. They named each collection to align with its provenance. The Cameron Family Papers, Pettigrew Family Papers, Manigault Family

Papers, DeRosset Family Papers, and so many more filling 1,000 linear feet of shelving in Wilson Library's stacks.

These records carry immeasurable meaning beyond academia for people looking for their people in the historical record that left too many nameless and almost all in the margins.

In the absence of vital records and census data for people enslaved in the American South, plantation papers kept by the enslavers may well be the only extant paper records of their lives.

By foregrounding and centering descriptions of African Americans mentioned in these family papers, we can aid researchers in piecing together the life stories of their enslaved ancestors.



## Figure 43

# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

## Legacy Description

1. Correspondence, 1702-1940 and undated.
    - 1.1. Loose Letters, 1702-1940.
      - 1.1.1. 1702-1815.
      - 1.1.2. 1817-1849.
      - 1.1.3. 1850-1860.
      - 1.1.4. 1861-1864.
      - 1.1.5. 1865-1871.
      - 1.1.6. 1872-1940.
      - 1.1.7. Undated.
    - 1.2. Letter Books, 1849-1870.
  2. Financial and Legal Materials, 1671-1895.
    - 2.1. Loose Papers, 1671-1895.
    - 2.2. Volumes, 1770-1870.
  3. Diaries, 1798-1936.
  4. Other Materials.
  5. Pictures.
- Addition of March 2007, 1854-1878.

## Conscious Editing

1. Records Documenting Enslaved People
2. Other Family Papers

This proposed change to the intellectual arrangement of the DeRosset Family Papers reframes the collection to elevate the lives of enslaved people and to decenter the enslavers. N.B., the Library has a task team exploring how collections related to slavery can be arranged and described using a conscious editing lens. The team's work will inform how collections like the DeRosset Family Papers are reframed.

The proofs of concept shown for Figure 43 have not been implemented at this time.

## Figure 44

# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

### Legacy Description

The collection includes DeRosset family papers, chiefly 1821-1877, relating to family life and social, religious, political, and military activities of DeRossets in Wilmington and Hillsborough, N.C.; Columbia, S.C.; New York, N.Y.; and other locations. Included is correspondence of several generations of DeRosset women, documenting the education of children, family health, fashion, social events, religious opinions, and household problems. Other correspondence relates to mercantile partnerships in Wilmington and New York City; family members' relocation to England because of interests in the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad after the American Civil War; the family rice plantation in Brunswick County, N.C.; and slaves in North Carolina and South Carolina. Civil War era letters describe hardships on the home front.

### Conscious Editing

The collection contains a volume dated 1770 to 1854 with lists of people who were enslaved by the white DeRosset family on their rice plantation in Brunswick County, N.C., and in cities and towns in North Carolina and South Carolina. The lists document dates of births and deaths within the enslaved Black community whom the DeRossets claimed as property. The collection contains four letters composed by William Henry Thurber, Bella DeRosset, Daniel D. Haines, and Jimmey, all of whom were enslaved by the DeRossets and trafficked to Wilmington, N.C., during the American Civil War.

The legacy description centers the white family, who had claimed people as property, and the presence of Black lives in the collection is effectively erased. Through conscious editing, the people who were enslaved by the DeRosset family are named, which aids genealogists searching for ancestors, and their lives are centered. The role of the DeRosset family as enslavers and traffickers is made clear.

## Figure 44 continued

### **Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers**

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

This proposed change to the intellectual arrangement of the DeRosset Family Papers reframes the collection to elevate the lives of enslaved people and to decenter the enslavers. N.B., The Library has a task team exploring how collections related to slavery can be arranged and described using a conscious editing lens. The team's work will inform how collections like the DeRosset Family Papers are reframed.

The proofs of concept shown for Figure 44 have not been implemented at this time.

## Figure 45

# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

## Legacy Description

### Series 1. Correspondence, 1702-1940

Chiefly personal [family correspondence of DeRosset family women](#). Their letters to each other are generally long and informative, containing much information about life in Wilmington and other towns in North and South Carolina. Their primary topics of conversation included the education of children, family health, fashion, household matters, social events, and religious opinions...

#### Subseries 1.1. Loose Letters, 1702-1940.

Correspondence of four generations of the DeRosset family, particularly the families of Armand John DeRosset (1767-1859), his sons...

##### Subseries 1.1.1. 1702-1815

Chiefly letters of Adam Boyd, stepfather of Armand John DeRosset Sr. (1767-1859) ...

Folder 1 1702-1815

##### Subseries 1.1.2. 1817-1849

Scattered letters of Armand John DeRosset Sr. (1767-1859), who wrote to his wife and children...

Folder 2 1817-1823

Folder 3 1824-1826

## Conscious Editing

### Series 1. Records Documenting Enslaved People

Collection materials that include known and identified [documentation of enslaved people, white enslavers, and enslavement](#).

#### Box 3 Correspondence including letters composed by enslaved people, 1859-1865

Contains seven [letters composed by Black people who were enslaved by the white DeRosset family and trafficked to Wilmington, N.C.](#), during the American Civil War. William Henry Thurber (Active 1862), Bella DeRosset (Active 1781-1862), Daniel D. Haines (Active 1863), and Jimmey (Active 1863) addressed their letters to white women enslavers including Eliza Ann DeRosset residing in Hillsborough, N.C., northwest of Wilmington and the DeRossets' rice plantation in Brunswick County, N.C.

## Figure 45 continued

### **Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers**

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

The contents list has been changed so that details of Black people who were enslaved by the DeRosset family come first, elevating the prominence of Black lives and enhancing discoverability in the archive. The enslaved people are named and known dates for their lives are provided. Words such as “trafficking” are used to clearly show the power dynamic between the DeRosset family and the people they enslaved and not mask the reality of enslaved people’s lives.

The proofs of concept shown for Figure 45 have not been implemented at this time. This proposed change to the intellectual arrangement of the DeRosset Family Papers reframes the collection to elevate the lives of enslaved people and to decenter the enslavers. N.B., The Library has a task team exploring how collections related to slavery can be arranged and described using a conscious editing lens. The team’s work will inform how collections like the DeRosset Family Papers are reframed.

## Figure 46

# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

### Legacy Description

Omar ibn Said  
“Uncle Moro” (Omeroh) the African (or Arab) Prince whom General Owen bought, and who lived in Wilmington, N.C. for many years, and died in Bladen County in 1864, aged about 90 years. Reverse of this image contains holograph reminiscences of A. M. Waddell about Omar, written in 1905. Also included is a published autobiography.

### Conscious Editing

Image of Omar ibn Said (1770?-1864)  
Matted albumen print  
Photographic print of Omar ibn Said, an Islamic scholar and the author of an 1831 autobiography. Said survived the middle passage from his home in Futa Toro, Africa to North America and was enslaved in South Carolina and later North Carolina by James Owen. On the verso of the image, white politician Alfred Moore Waddell wrote a narrative description of Said’s life stating that he had lived in Wilmington, N.C., and died in Bladen County, N.C. A copy of “Oh ye Americans”: The Autobiography of Omar ibn Said is included in the folder with the image.

The legacy description is written using the language of enslavers, which referred to Omar ibn Said as “Uncle Moro/African Prince.” Omar ibn Said’s ethnicity is vague and inaccurate. Details about his life and experience of being trafficked and enslaved are omitted in the legacy description. The details about his autobiography are so minimal that authorship is not even assigned to Omar ibn Said. Instead, “the holograph reminiscences of A.M. Wadell about Omar, written in 1905” are described and therefore made more central. Although Omar ibn Said was a scholar of Islam and wrote numerous manuscripts in Arabic, he was not Arab. “Arab” and “Muslim” are not synonyms; before his capture and enslavement, Omar ibn

## Figure 46 continued

### **Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers**

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

Said lived in modern-day Senegal, which is not a part of the Arabian Peninsula and whose predominant language is French. The remediated description is an attempt to repair this violence of erasure. Omar ibn Said is correctly named and described as an "Islamic scholar." Brief background history and details about the material contained in the collection are added to aid discovery and access.

## Figure 47

# Describing Relationships of Power by Identifying People Claimed as Property in Family Papers

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the DeRosset Family Papers (collection number 00214)*

### Legacy Description

The collection includes DeRosset family papers, chiefly 1821-1877, relating to family life and social, religious, political, and military activities of DeRossets in Wilmington, N.C., and Hillsborough, N.C.; Columbia, S.C.; New York, N.Y.; and other locations. **Included is correspondence of several generations of DeRosset women, documenting the education of children, family health, fashion, social events, religious opinions, and household problems.**

### Conscious Editing

Correspondence of members of the white DeRosset family document the family's business and financial interests, **which depended on enslaved labor before and during the American Civil War**; politics; military service; and social and religious life in Wilmington, N.C., Hillsborough, N.C., Columbia, S.C., New York, N.Y., and other locations. **Letters between white women form the bulk of the collection's correspondence, and topics include education of their children, family health, fashion, social events, religious opinions, and household problems.**

White identity has been added to this description to create a more equitable archive in which identities for Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas are also labeled in finding aids. Adding a note to say that the DeRossets' businesses and financial interests "depended on enslaved labor before and during the American Civil War" provides important historical context by which to interpret this collection.



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# Gendering and Misgendering

Applying gender labels to individuals who belonged to other time periods and cultures is inherently shaped and limited by our own frames of reference and by our contemporary understanding of gender roles. In many cases, we cannot know how individuals would have described themselves.

“The creation of metadata requires interpretation and labeling and it can be a highly subjective and political act” ([Digital Transgender Archive](#), n.d.).

We seek to be transparent about our assumptions and to avoid reinscribing oppressive ideologies and expectations about what is “normal” or “natural” when applying terms for describing gender.

## Gendering

Gendering is often defined as “the social assignment or designation of a person’s gender, usually on the basis of perceived sex” (Gender Spectrum: “[Understanding Gender](#)”). For the purpose of this guide, in the context of archival description, “gendering” means making a determination about the assumed social gender of an individual based on attributes such as their personal name, pronouns used to refer to them in contemporaneous and subsequent references, evidence of their familial relationships and partnerships, and other contextual details.

## Misgendering

Misgendering means calling someone by a name or a gender or using gendered pronouns that do not align with their gender identity. Misgendering can also apply to gender-based assumptions about groups or implied audiences, such as an unexamined assumption that an audience for an event or a curriculum would be entirely male based on a cultural bias that assumes a cisgender man’s perspective as the default.

A number of considerations potentially fall within the scope of this guide, reflecting the complexity of gender as an aspect of identity. We have grouped these considerations into two related but distinct areas:

First, how should we approach describing gender identities of individuals represented in our collections, and how do we determine gender for historical actors? How do we edit legacy description of materials that represent a person as a gender identity with which they may not have identified? Should we make assertions about the gender of historical actors in their authority records? We work with images with little contextual information to support an evidence-based identification of gender. Should we assert a historical actor’s gender identity based exclusively on

visual information in a photograph? If a published author changes their gender identity and requests that the name tied to a former gender identity be removed, how do we navigate catalog and authority records for their names and published works?

Second, how do we ensure that people other than straight cisgender men are represented and discoverable in our collections? How do we increase visibility in our collections for historical actors assumed to identify as genders other than cisgender men? Can we identify, name, and center the experiences of other genders in the descriptions of collections that previously focused on presumed cisgender men?

Assumptions about gender and gender roles are deeply embedded in cultural norms and so intertwined with language as to easily escape notice. In this section, we identify ways that gendering and misgendering may appear in our archival and bibliographic description.

What are the assumptions we make when we use gendered pronouns in reference to named persons and gendered terms, “son” or “daughter,” “brother” and “sister,” “husband” and “wife,” to describe marital partners and other familial relationships?

Who do we identify by name in a collection description? Are males named more comprehensively than the females represented in the collections? Have we assumed that men are more important to name? Do we use the same forms of names for males and females, or do we, for example, use a first name only to refer to a female or use a husband’s name preceded by “Mrs.”?

For whom do we name collections? Have we been equitable in collection naming, or have we defaulted to naming collections for the most prominent male in the collection?

Whose experience is centered in collection descriptions? Do unexamined gender-based assumptions result in inequitable descriptions related to gender?

What access points have we used to describe gender-specific content? Have we used established LCSH terms that specify women in specific occupations (e.g., “Women violinists”) or in specific form and genre terms (e.g., “American poetry—Women authors”; “Women—Diaries”). Are gender qualifiers necessary? Are we reinforcing cultural assumptions about gender when we use them? When we contribute names to the Library of Congress Name Authority File, are we doing so equitably, or are we privileging males?

The past few decades, accumulated changes in how gender is understood and represented—both in American culture and in library and archival descriptive practices—bring into focus the need to articulate guidelines for how we think about and describe the genders of persons within our collections. At the time and place of this writing, ideas and terminology about gender and identity reflect the slow absorption of 50 years of societal change. As people other than cisgender men have gained more freedom and power to assert themselves across all spheres of human activity in the

United States, more people have had greater access to different kinds of self-definition, and there is a greater understanding of the range of possibilities for humans' identities in relation to gender.

One of the hallmarks of these overall cultural changes is a rejection of long-accepted norms about sex and gender, and especially the idea that one is dependent on the other.

Sharing preferred pronouns as part of personal introductions is becoming common practice in professional contexts, and with that practice, more people are recognizing that conscious and correct use of a person's pronouns is a fundamental way to respect their humanity.

During the past two decades, how people can be defined and described via libraries' and archives' descriptive practices for collections materials and authority records has also shifted in important ways. In archival description, describing creators and other persons represented in collections materials has long been common practice, with demographic details included in biographical sketches and abstracts. Within library cataloging, however, catalogers typically have not recorded demographic details about creators. The implementation of Resource Description and Access (RDA) by the Library of Congress in 2013 departed from established practices by including the option for catalogers to identify and provide a label for the gender of creators in authority records, along with other attributes. There is also increasing convergence between library and archival practices, such as the use of shared authority records, which mean that RDA cataloging rules potentially affect the content that appears in linked archival description.

Within the Library community, RDA's Rule 9.7 (instructions for recording the gender of creators) prompted intense and constructive discussion about how and even whether authority records should represent gender and what kinds of labels should be used. The initial implementation of RDA by the Library of Congress originally included only three terms for recording gender: male, female, or unknown. Following a collective effort initiated within the cataloging community, the RDA Steering Committee updated the rule to allow catalogers to determine locally which terms to use for describing gender and for gender to be recorded as a separate element from the unique name string representing a person. There has since been work put into providing more explicit guidance for catalogers and developing more inclusive and accurate vocabularies.

Guidance for archival practice about how to represent gender is less detailed, however. Within the current edition of *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACCS)*, the instructions for creating biographical histories do not provide explicit guidance about how to approach determining and describing a person's gender. *DACS* instructions for creating archival authority records also include gender as an aspect that "may be included" in the historical summary narrative but do not provide details beyond this. This flexibility leaves room for organizations to articulate the guidelines that define their practice.

To give a specific example from our collections of the complexity that can be involved, we can consider how Pauli Murray is described in our finding aids. (In this text, I use she/her pronouns to

refer to Murray, although these may not be entirely accurate or complete.) Murray appears in a few of our archival collections, and the materials and our description generally refer to her as female.

For example, a 1976 interview with Murray appears in the Southern Oral History Program Collection's Series G: Southern Women, 1964–2007, and description for a box of records related to Murray from 1976 to 1978 within the Office of Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Nelson Ferebee Taylor Records, 1972–1980, also uses she/her pronouns.

Archival evidence from Murray's papers at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute suggests that Murray wrestled with questions about gender identity throughout her life, however, and some researchers have identified her as a transgender man. What criteria should determine what terms are used to refer to Murray in our archival description?

For a model that we could consider incorporating into our statements about our conscious editing and ethical descriptive practices, Social Networks and Archival Context's (SNAC) editorial policy includes a [demographics statement](#) that lists its guiding principles for ethically based practices for creating demographic data. The statement acknowledges "that demographic categories, such as gender and nationality, are socially constructed labels, and how people and groups self-identify is fluid and changes over time."

The statement also touches on the potential benefits of retaining legacy terms by acknowledging "the value of historic terminologies as well as modern user discovery needs." The guiding principles listed include privileging creators' self-identification, striving for transparency, and making evidence-based statements that include citations and notes to document decision-making and sources.

Our guidelines for descriptive practices regarding the gender of authors and persons represented in collections materials are currently in development. Here we provide a recommendation about documentation and statements for users and examples to describe specific cases that Technical Services (TS) Bibliographic and TS Archival staff members have recently addressed in response to the questions raised in these areas. We have also included guidelines from the NCDHC that outline clear instructions for describing persons in images with little or no contextual information.

Recommendation: Include a statement about our approach to demographics data in our public-facing Wilson Library policies. The statement could outline our guiding principles about decision-making for describing gender and might cover the following:

- Using gendered terms and pronouns

- Language in subject headings and our intention to increase discoverability

Possible models include the [SNAC Demographics Statement](#), [Digital Transgender Archive](#), and [Queer Digital History Project](#).

## Describing People in Images

Current Practices and Guidelines From NCDHC:

Over the past year, NCDHC has established changes to its metadata creation processes for historical photographs to avoid misgendering individuals by incorrectly assigning gendered labels based on clothing or other circumstantial/symbolic aspects of an image and in the absence of evidence about the self-identification/preferred labels of the people represented. They have carefully articulated guidelines for reducing subjective decision-making and gendered bias when describing photographs.

## Catalog Records

The nature of cataloging practice, as well as the inflexibility of our systems, can lead to problems when people change their names. An author whose books are held in the Library's collections contacted us to ask why their former name still appeared in our catalog despite a name change.

In the case of the author who contacted Wilson Library, we deviated from the cataloging rules by removing their former name from the transcribed portion of our catalog records; now, only the author's current name appears in our catalog. We felt that it was more important to be respectful of the author's wishes than to strictly follow the rules of transcription. Currently, we are only able to edit records locally, not the OCLC records for authors.

Other libraries have reported being contacted by authors who wanted all traces of their former names removed not only from the catalog but from physical materials as well (such as by replacing the title pages of theses they have written under a former name). As situations like this come up, we will consider the possibilities for handling them, prioritizing the safety and well-being of trans people.

## Figure 48

# Gendering and Misgendering

*Catalog record for Jenner, Caitlyn, and Mark Abraham. Bruce Jenner's Guide to the Olympics. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1979.*

## Legacy Description

[Bruce Jenner's Guide to the Olympics](#)

[Bruce Jenner](#) with Marc Abraham.

[Jenner, Caitlyn, 1949-](#)

Kansas City : Andrews and McMeel, 1979.

Caitlyn Jenner is transgender and was formerly named Bruce Jenner. Despite the name change, Bruce Jenner still appears in our catalog because cataloging rules call for transcription of the title and other information directly from the book, which is then displayed in the library catalog. However, the authorized name heading can be changed so "Jenner, Caitlyn, 1949-" is used to collocate all works by Caitlyn Jenner, whether written as Bruce Jenner or Caitlyn Jenner.

## Figure 49

# Gendering and Misgendering

*Catalog record for Middlebrook, Diane Wood. Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.*

## Legacy Description

Suits me : the double life of Billy Tipton  
Diane Wood Middlebrook.  
Middlebrook, Diane Wood, 1939-2007  
Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

### Subjects

Tipton, Billy, 1914-1989  
Jazz musicians--United States--Biography  
[Cross-dressers--United States--Biography](#)

Billy Tipton was a jazz musician who lived as a man for several decades; upon his death, he was found to be anatomically female. In this biography, Middlebrook writes about Tipton as a woman living in drag and uses female pronouns to describe him. The subject heading for the book, created by the Library of Congress to provide subject access, includes a subject heading for [Cross-dressers--United States--Biography](#). Billy Tipton died in the 1980s, and the biography was published in the 1990s, during times when our understanding of gender was quite different from what it is now. (In addition, there were no doubt many fewer available subject headings related to gender at that time, and a cataloger working today might make different choices.) Though “cross-dressers” seems both inadequate and offensive as a way of describing Billy Tipton, it is difficult to know what subject heading would be appropriate to describe his identity since we have no way of knowing whether he identified as transgender or in some other way.



## Figure 50

# Gendering and Misgendering

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Alice Morgan Person Papers (collection number 03987)*

## Conscious Editing

Title

[Alice Morgan Person Papers](#)

Biographical Note

Alice Morgan was born in 1840 near Petersburg, Va. She received most of her education at home....Her husband's disability, coupled with the economic consequences of the Civil War, led Alice Morgan Person to market a patent medicine, the recipe for which had been given her by a neighbor. In 1882, she began selling Mrs. Joe Person's Remedy door-to-door in Charlotte, Raleigh, and other major North Carolina towns. The Remedy proved quite popular, and Person was soon known throughout the South for her medicine and for her piano playing. She performed popular tunes at fairs....She left a considerable estate, most of which had been accumulated as a result of her business activities. Also surviving her is [an autobiography that offers a detailed account of her public life, including the challenges of starting and sustaining a business as a "woman in a man's world."](#)

Subject Headings

[Autobiography--Women authors.](#)

[Businesswomen--North Carolina.](#)

[Women--North Carolina--Biography.](#)

[Women--North Carolina--Diaries.](#)

This finding aid highlights Alice Morgan Person's autobiography, a resource that was historically downplayed based on gender-biased assumptions that Person's experiences as a woman were not significant. Gendered subject headings have also been included to aid access to women's history and Person's autobiography.

## Figure 51

# Gendering and Misgendering

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Augustus Thomas Papers (collection number 12000)*

## Conscious Editing

The collection contains manuscript versions of seventy-five of Augustus Thomas's plays. Other materials include professional correspondence, chiefly concerning plays, actors, and other topics relating to the theater and publishing, and one letter, 1924, from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Thomas, asking his advice as a delegate of the Democratic National Convention; personal correspondence consisting mainly of letters from Thomas to his son Luke Thomas, September 1910-June 1914, and chiefly concerning daily activities and the health of family members; speeches, eulogies, essays, and other miscellaneous writings; clippings of Augustus Thomas's cartoons; articles about his career; numerous reviews of his plays; telegrams sent to Lisle Colby Thomas on her husband's death; a typescript copy of her *A Well-known Playwright's Wife*; a sketch book with drawings and personal messages addressed to Thomas from various artists, including Frederic Remington; the program from a 1909 Lambs Club fund-raising event; and a copy of the privately published honeymoon diary of Augustus Thomas's daughter, Glory Thomas Elliott, describing her trip to England and France in 1924.

### Subject Headings

[Authors' spouses--United States--Biography.](#)

[Autobiography--Women authors.](#)

Augustus Thomas's wife, Lisle Colby Thomas, and daughter, Glory Thomas Elliot, are named in the scope and content note for this collection, which ensures that people other than straight cisgender men are represented and discoverable in our collections. Gendered subject headings have also been included to aid access.

## Figure 52

# Gendering and Misgendering

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Isabella C. Sourtan Letter (collection number 00719)*

## Legacy Description

Title

[Manuel J. Thouston Letter](#)

Main Entry

[Thouston, Manuel J., Active 1865.](#)

Abstract

[Letter from Isabella C. Sourtan, Liberty, Va., to her master M.J. Thouston asking that she be allowed to return as his slave.](#)

Biographical Note

[Manuel J. Thouston, a lawyer in Gloucester County, Va.](#)

Subject Headings

[Freedmen--Virginia--Correspondence.](#)  
[Reconstruction \(U.S. history, 1865-1877\)--Virginia.](#)  
[Slavery--United States--History--19th century--Sources.](#)

## Conscious Editing

Title

[Isabella C. Sourtan Letter, 10 July 1865](#)

Abstract

[Letter from Isabella C. Sourtan, a freedwoman of Liberty, Va., asking permission to return and work for Manuel J. Thouston, formerly her enslaver, in Gloucester County, Va. She also mentioned John, a freedman with ties to Gloucester County, Va., for whom she would send if given the opportunity to return.](#)

Main Entry

[Sourtan, Isabella C., Active 1865.](#)

Biographical Note

[Isabella C. Sourtan was a freedwoman in Liberty, Va., in July 1865. She was previously enslaved by Manuel J. Thouston, a lawyer in Gloucester County, Va. John was also a freedman in Liberty, Va., in July 1865, with ties to enslavement in Gloucester County, Va.](#)

Subject Headings

[African American women--Virginia--History--19th century.](#)  
[Freedmen--Virginia--Correspondence.](#)  
[Reconstruction \(U.S. history, 1865-1877\)--Virginia.](#)  
[Slavery--United States--History--19th century--Sources.](#)

## Figure 52 continued

### Gendering and Misgendering

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Isabella C. Sourtan Letter (collection number 00719)*

In the remediated description, the collection title has been changed to reflect Isabella C. Sourtan's authorship of the letter, making her the primary focus of this finding aid, not the person who had formerly enslaved her and who was the recipient of the letter. She is also centered in the "Main Entry" and "Biographical Note" sections. Details of John, a freedman whom she mentions, have also been added as a way to surface evidence of Black lives often hidden in the archives. The addition of LCSH also increases access to African American women's history.

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# Revealing the Woman Behind Mrs. Husband's Name

"Mrs. Husband's Name" refers to a naming convention popularized in the 19th century and widely used until the late 20th century in which married women were not referred to by their own names but by the names of their husbands. An example might be Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. This form of address, which completely obscures the personal identity of a married woman, stems from the United States' long-standing practice of legal coverture and the culture or cult of domesticity that defined the "proper" roles for white women.

Coverture stipulated that when a woman married, her legal rights and identity were subsumed by that of her husband. This meant that women no longer had a separate legal existence outside of their husbands. Practically and legally speaking, freeborn married women had no right to their wages and were unable to sign contracts, serve as the guardian of any underage children, or keep property they brought into their marriages. Although laws giving some married women more rights began to be passed from the 1850s onwards, the legacy of coverture lasted well into the 20th century.

## Context in the Wilson Special Collections Library

Archival collections and descriptions mirror the accepted values and practices of society during the time they were created. Since each of the five special collections that make up the Wilson Library began their life when Mrs. Husband's Name was the de facto form of address for married women, that naming construction can be found throughout collections in the Library. Furthermore, since collection material is used to inform archival description, Mrs. Husband's Name has been used in several places in the Library's finding aids. Mrs. Husband's Name can be found in collection titles; front matter, such as the historical note or scope and content note; transcribed and assigned file names; and subject headings.

## Why the Guideline Is Needed

Similar to the way coverture ended the legal personhood of married women, the Mrs. Husband's Name construction hides the personal identities of married women in that of their husbands. While Mrs. Husband's Name has declined in contemporary usage, this guideline is needed for Wilson Library staff members to contend with its historic usage in collection material and description and to decide how to best describe married women in new additions to legacy collections and new accessions.

## Guideline

For equity, use the same level of formality or informality when using the full names or surnames only of men and women.

Refrain from using gender-specific titles (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss, etc.) unless used to clarify an identity when only the surname is known.

If a married woman's full name is known, the woman should be identified by her first and last name, not Mrs. [Surname] or Mrs. [Husband's Name].

If Mrs. Husband's Name is found in collection material, use the married woman's full name if known and parenthetically indicate that the subject may be referred to as Mrs. Husband's Name in documents.

As with other areas of identity and naming, whenever possible, defer to terms and naming preferred by that person. While Mrs. Husband's Name is no longer widely used, some individuals may still prefer this form of address. If feasible, reach out to donors and families to determine the person's chosen manner of address.



## Figure 53

### Revealing the Woman Behind Mrs. Husband's Name

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Salisbury Book Club Records (collection number 04054)*

#### Legacy Description

The Salisbury Book Club, of Salisbury, N.C., held its first meeting on 1 March 1891. The membership of the club usually included 14 ladies from Salisbury and nearby, who generally met once a month. Some members and visitors included Mrs. Walter S. Blackmer, Mrs. William C. Blackmer, Mrs. A. H. Boyden, Mrs. Robert Vance Brawley, Mrs. Edward W. Burt, Mrs. Hayden Clement, Mrs. S. S. Cole, Mrs. Archibald C. Cree, Miss Dresser, Mrs. James F. Griffith, Mrs. Irwin, Mrs. Clarence Klutz, Miss Jeanie Klutz, Mrs. Theodore F. Klutz, Mrs. Murrell Land, Mrs. E. D. McCall, Mrs. Francis Johnston Murdoch, Mrs. Edwin R. Overman, Mrs. Pierson, Mrs. M. C. Quinn, Mrs. W. H. Ragland, Mrs. James Hill Ramsay, Mrs. Robert B. Scales, Mrs. Fletcher F. Smith, Mrs. Bayard Taylor, Mrs. F. C. Tiernan, Mrs. Warren W. Way, Mrs. White, Mrs. John Whitehead, Miss Anne Wiley, Mrs. Marion Easton Wiley, and Mrs. W. M. Wiley.

The members of the Salisbury Book Club are all referred to by the names of their husbands in the historical note for the collection. Figure 53 shows a current example of "Mrs. Husband's Name" in the Library's finding aids that we would like to remediate.

## Figure 54

# Revealing the Woman Behind Mrs. Husband's Name

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Edward Babel Collection (collection number 20020)*

## Legacy Description

[Mrs. James P. Johnson, 1975.](#)

13 items.

Manuscript and photographs relating to Mrs. James P. Johnson's dulcimer, which had belonged to her father, William Butler. A few photographs feature both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson with the dulcimer.

Mrs. James P. Johnson manuscript and photographs, 1975

[Mrs. Artemus Ward, 1959-1975.](#)

3 items.

Manuscript and photograph relating to the dulcimer belonging to Mrs. Artemus Ward. The photograph of Mrs. Ward playing the hammered dulcimer is a copy of a photo featured in "The State" magazine in February 1959. Mrs. Ward lived near Seagrove, N.C., and had died by the time that Babel did his research. Babel gathered information from her son.

Examples of married women being referred to by their husband's names in the contents list of a collection, shown as a current example of "Mrs. Husband's Name" in the Library's finding aids that we would like to remediate.

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# Balancing the Work of Conscious Editing With Problematic LCSH

The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are the main subject terms that libraries across the country use as a controlled vocabulary for describing their materials. LCSH dates back to the late 19th century and is maintained by the Library of Congress, though other libraries can propose new headings and changes to existing headings through the [Subject Authority Cooperative \(SACO\) Program](#).

LCSH is based on the concept of “literary warrant,” meaning that a subject heading can be established only when it is needed to describe a book or another resource that a library is cataloging. It is arranged hierarchically, with most terms having one or more broader terms, narrower terms, or related terms (for instance, “Women violinists” has the broader terms “Violinists” and “Women musicians”).

Because LCSH is such an old vocabulary, and because it reflects our white supremacist and patriarchal culture, it is rife with problems. Many terms are marked by race and gender only when the race is nonwhite or the gender is something other than male. “Women violinists” is an established subject heading, but not “Men violinists”; there generally is an established term for men only in cases of predominantly female professions, such as “Male nurses.” Similarly, “African American lawyers” is an established subject heading, along with many other professions, but only very seldom is there a corresponding term for white people; again, often the term exists in LCSH only when the profession is predominantly nonwhite, such as “Caregivers, White.” These lacunae result in part from a lack of literary warrant—seldom does someone write explicitly about male violinists or white lawyers.

The most notorious recent case of problematic LCSH terminology is the subject heading “Illegal aliens.” Thanks to advocacy from students and librarians at Dartmouth University, among others, the Library of Congress decided in 2016 to cancel that dehumanizing subject heading and replace it with the terms “Noncitizens” and “Unauthorized immigration.” However, the United States Congress made the unusual decision to introduce legislation to block the subject change from happening, and an eventual appropriations bill included wording directing the Library of Congress to make subject heading changes or additions open to stakeholder input. Since then, however, on November 12, 2021, the Library of Congress replaced the subject headings “Aliens” and “Illegal aliens” with “Noncitizens” and “Illegal immigration.”

The fight to change LCSH terminology is not new. Sanford Berman, a former librarian at the Hennepin County Library in Minnesota, is a longtime critic of LCSH and its use of biased and archaic terminology. His book *Prejudices and Antipathies* was first published in 1971 and argued that LCSH terminology “can only ‘satisfy’ parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle- and

higher-income brackets, largely domiciled in suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization" (Berman, 1993, p. 15). For a time, the Hennepin County Library maintained its own list of subject headings to supplement LCSH.

Why do we use LCSH despite these problems? Cataloging of library materials is done in a cooperative environment using shared tools; it is not feasible for each library to develop its own subject headings, and it would be a Herculean task to develop a vocabulary as comprehensive as LCSH.

What about advocating for change in LCSH? It is absolutely possible to advocate for change to individual headings. "Illegal aliens" would be a good example if Congress had not acted to stop the change. Other changes have been made over time, such as "Negroes" changing to "Afro-Americans" and finally to "African Americans." But the structure of LCSH makes it extremely difficult to implement more sweeping changes. For instance, there is no subject heading for people of color; the term "Minorities" has been used instead. This term hardly seems sufficient or accurate to represent the concept of people of color (who, for one thing, are not necessarily minorities) and yet the number of subject headings beginning with "Minorities" or "Minority" is in the hundreds, not to mention the thousands of catalog records that would need to be updated. Making structural changes to LCSH is extremely difficult for these reasons.

Though a wholesale overhaul or replacement of LCSH is unlikely, at least in the short term, there are some approaches we can take locally to mitigate the problems with LCSH.

A former Library staff member developed an innovative stopgap solution to the problem of offensive LCSH terms that our local consortium, the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) has implemented in recent years. Rather than change the LCSH terms in our individual catalog records, TRLN libraries work together to substitute the offensive terms with inclusive vocabularies that are cooperatively controlled by TRLN, and change the display of the problematic terms in our shared catalog. The hundreds of catalog records that have the subject heading "Illegal aliens" or related terms now display the term "Undocumented immigrants." Similar changes have been made to other problematic LCSH terms (see the [complete list of remapped terms](#)). Users can search either on the original term or the remapped term and get the same results.

The University Libraries is a member of the SACO program and can propose new LCSH terms or changes to existing terms, enabling us to advocate for changes that would make LCSH more inclusive. We also participate in the [African American SACO Funnel Project](#), which is working to propose new terms related to the African American experience, such as "Blackface," that LCSH lacked.

We can use terms from other thesauri when LCSH is inadequate for our needs. For instance, [Homosaurus](#) is a vocabulary of LGBTQ+ terms that goes into more depth than LCSH, as well as

using terminology that is preferred by the people being described (such as “LGBTQ+ people” rather than the LCSH term “Sexual minorities”). Another example is the [Medical Subject Headings \(MeSH\) thesaurus](#), a controlled and hierarchically-organized vocabulary produced by the National Library of Medicine.

Finally, we can choose to omit problematic and dehumanizing LCSH terms from our description when there are other terms that will better meet our needs, such as in the Student Action for Farmworkers Collection example in Figure 55.

## Figure 55

# Balancing the Work of Conscious Editing With Problematic LCSH

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Student Action with Farmworkers Collection (collection number 20317)*

### Legacy Description

Illegal aliens--North Carolina--Economic conditions.

Illegal aliens--North Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Illegal aliens--North Carolina--Social life and customs.

Illegal aliens--South Carolina--Economic conditions.

Illegal aliens--South Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Illegal aliens--South Carolina--Social life and customs.

### Conscious Editing

Central Americans--North Carolina--Economic conditions.

Central Americans--North Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Central Americans--North Carolina--Social life and customs.

Central Americans--South Carolina--Economic conditions.

Central Americans--South Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Central Americans--South Carolina--Social life and customs.

Mexicans--North Carolina--Economic conditions.

Mexicans--North Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Mexicans--North Carolina--Social life and customs.

Mexicans--South Carolina--Economic conditions.

Mexicans--South Carolina--Religious life and customs.

Mexicans--South Carolina--Social life and customs.

## Figure 55 continued

### **Balancing the Work of Conscious Editing With Problematic LCSH**

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Student Action with Farmworkers Collection (collection number 20317)*

The Student Action for Farmworkers Collection describes agricultural workers in the South. The original finding aid described the farmworkers as Latinos, many of whom were “illegal immigrants to the United States,” and it included corresponding subject headings for “Illegal aliens.” When we looked at the description through a conscious editing lens, we determined that the content of the collection does not actually pertain to the workers’ legal status. We revised the description to refer to the workers as migrants from Mexico and Central America, removed the “Illegal aliens” subject headings, and replaced them with subject headings for “Central Americans” and “Mexicans,” which more accurately represent the humanity of the people being described in the collection.



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## Balancing the Work of Conscious Editing With Problematic LCSH

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# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

UNC-Chapel Hill is a historically white university with historical, intellectual, and financial ties to the enslavement of people, the enslavers, the Confederacy, Jim Crow, school segregation, white supremacist movements and violence, and eugenics. In 2021, the University remains predominately white in its student body, faculty, staff, and administration.

The University Libraries' holdings, both in the general collection and in special collections, reflect the overwhelming whiteness of the University in its first three centuries. The Wilson Library's archival collections comprise a nearly all-white set of historical narratives about the University, the state, the region, the country, and the world. From the mid-20th century to the present, white people created, donated, curated, processed, described, cataloged, preserved, and studied the majority of the more than 6,000 archival collections.

In archival description, the whiteness became invisible. We tended to see through the whiteness when we analyzed collections, and we wrote description that perpetuated whiteness as the unidentified norm. Since the 1990s, Wilson Library archivists routinely highlighted narratives and documentation of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas. They did so to enhance discovery and to create more access points for collection materials related to subjects in which our academic researchers had expressed interest.

Researchers asked us for directions to collection materials related to the narratives of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas, and we wrote archival description that underscored the presence of these materials in collections and identified individuals, families, communities, and organizations with racial and ethnic demographic information.

In writing archival description, especially for collections that document the American South, we presupposed and prioritized an audience for our archival description that was composed of academic historians and graduate students. Our target audience, we assumed, was knowledgeable and understood that the history of the American South is inextricable from African American history and the history of First Nations and European colonialism and that the South's history is also connected to southern communities of Asian and Latinx people.

We took shortcuts in the interest of brevity, and reluctant to point out what was so obvious, we did not explain that every historical actor we described was white, unless designated otherwise. Adding access points for demographic information produced an invisible norm that assumed whiteness and that othered historical actors who were not white.

On a practical level, the exceptionality of the terms related to Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas represented in our collections have made those terms useful

access points. If we comprehensively include white identities, the ubiquity of “white” will render the term useless as a potential access point, but the value of adding white identity lies in a more equitable archive.

If race and ethnicity are important for discovery of collection material and context, we can approach the description equitably. When we underline the identities of Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas, we identify the white historical actors. We can unhide and acknowledge the ubiquitous whiteness of our collections.

We cannot assume that the complexities of southern history and race in America are broadly understood by our expanded national and international audiences outside the academy and the field of history. Adding white identities for historical actors represented in our collections provides students and nonacademic audiences with context that may help in their analysis of the collection.

In 2017, Wilson Library’s archivists began adding white identities to the description of families and individuals who had created collections and for historical actors when we provided identities for Black, Latinx, and Asian people and people Indigenous to the Americas represented in the collection materials. We did receive a handful of takedown requests for white identities from individuals who objected to the inclusion of their racial identity. We acknowledge that inclusion of that information for historical actors is different than the inclusion of identities for living persons, who can provide their own preferred identity terms, abstain from identifying their demographic information, or request changes and corrections.

## Figure 56

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Anne Romaine Papers (collection number 20304)*

### Legacy Description

Anne Romaine (1942-1995), folk music performer, historian, and writer, was active in the civil rights movement, and, with Bernice Johnson Reagon, created the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, a racially mixed group of traditional artists who toured the South. Romaine, who was married to civil rights activist Howard Romaine, also worked with Guy Carawan, Esther Lefever, and Hazel Dickens. Materials, 1935-1995, include correspondence, book manuscripts, songs, publicity materials, photographs, and recordings of Anne Romaine's performances...

### Conscious Editing

[Papers of white folklorist, folk musician, and civil rights activist Anne Romaine \(1942-1995\)](#) document her music career, teaching career, family and personal life, and social justice activism especially through the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, an organization [Romaine cofounded in 1966 with African American folklorist, singer, and civil rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon](#). Romaine, who was married to civil rights activist Howard Romaine, also worked with Guy Carawan, Esther Lefever, and Hazel Dickens. Materials, 1935-1995, include correspondence, book manuscripts, songs, publicity materials, photographs, and recordings of Anne Romaine's performances...

After conscious editing, greater emphasis is placed on the civil rights activism of Anne Romaine and the cofounder of the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, Bernice Johnson Reagon, an African American woman. This will aid discovery for users researching this topic. Race identity has been added to the remediated description, as it is considered important for the discovery of collection material and context, and it is applied equitably: the white and African American actors have been identified.

## Figure 57

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Bayard Morgan Wootten Photographic Collection (collection number P0011)*

### Legacy Description

Bayard Wootten (Mary Bayard Morgan Wootten) [was a female pioneer in the field of photography](#). She was successful as a photographer and studio operator from the early 1900s through the early 1950s, when the field was dominated by men. Wootten was born in New Bern, N.C., and, although she travelled across the United States during different periods of her career, North Carolina was her home. Her first studio was attached to her home in New Bern...Wootten's work, circa 1904-1954, is the focus of the collection, and there are many examples of the scenic landscape photography (much of it depicting mountains of western North Carolina) and [scenes of daily life of both white and black citizens](#) of the more rural areas of North Carolina for which she is best known. While most of the images are from North Carolina, there are also images taken in South Carolina, Virginia, and a few other southern states. Also included are images depicting members of the Wootten, Moulton, and Clarke families.

### Conscious Editing

The collection contains photographs primarily made by photographer and studio operator Bayard Morgan Wootten (1875-1959) a [white woman](#) of New Bern, N.C., and Chapel Hill, N.C. These images were made circa 1904-1954, when the field of professional photography was dominated by [white men](#). Images include scenic landscape photography, much of it depicting the western North Carolina mountains, and scenes of daily life of [both white and Black residents](#) in rural areas. Also included are images depicting members of the Wootten, Moulton, and Clarke families of North Carolina. Most of the images are from North Carolina, but some are from South Carolina, Virginia, and other southern states.... Wootten devised a classification system to manage the tens of thousands of images she made, and often created titles to accompany prints made for sale or display. [Some of these classifications or titles contain offensive and racist language.](#)

## Figure 57 continued

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Bayard Morgan Wootten Photographic Collection  
(collection number P0011)*

The value of adding the racial identity of all actors, including white people represented in this collection, leads to a more equitable archive. A content warning is provided at the end of the remediated description to prepare users for the offensive and racist content of some of the titles and descriptions that Bayard Wootten gave in her work.

## Figure 58

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Pettigrew Family Papers (collection number 00592)*

### Legacy Description

Represented are four generations of the Pettigrew family of Washington and Tyrrell counties, N.C. Prominent family members included James Pettigrew (d. 1784), who emigrated from Scotland, eventually settling in Charleston, S.C., where the family name was changed to Petigru; James's son, Charles Pettigrew (1744-1807), Anglican minister, and Charles's son, Ebenezer Pettigrew (1783-1848), state legislator, who established plantations in eastern North Carolina; and Ebenezer's children, including Charles Lockhart Pettigrew (1816-1873), planter; William S. Pettigrew (1818-1900), politician and Episcopal minister; and James Johnston Pettigrew (1828-1863), lawyer and Confederate Army officer; and James Louis Petigru, lawyer of Charleston, S.C. [The collection includes business and personal correspondence reflecting the varied interests and activities of Pettigrew family members](#), including the involvement of Charles and his grandson William in the Anglican and Episcopal churches; the development and management of Bonarva, Belgrade, and Magnolia plantations by Ebenezer Pettigrew, sometimes in cooperation with family friend James Cathcart

### Conscious Editing

The [collection contains documentation of the people enslaved by the white Pettigrew family on their rice plantations](#), Bonarva, Belgrade, and Magnolia, in Washington County, N.C. and Tyrrell County, N.C., and copies of original poetry by [George Moses Horton, a Black man enslaved in Chatham County, N.C.](#) Included are letters written between 1856 and 1858 that were dictated by [Malichi J. White \(Active 1820-1880\)](#), [Moses \(Active 1856-1858\)](#), and [Henry \(Active 1856-1858\)](#), who were [enslaved men](#) serving as overseers for William S. Pettigrew (1818-1900), a white Episcopalian minister and plantation owner. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century [correspondence with white members of the Pettigrew family](#), particularly Charles Pettigrew (1744-1807), Ebenezer Pettigrew (1783-1848), Charles Lockhart Pettigrew (1816-1873), and William S. Pettigrew pertain to the institution of slavery; a [thwarted uprising by enslaved people in Hillsborough, N.C. in 1830](#); [resistance by people enslaved on the Pettigrews' plantations](#); [trafficking of people in the Haitian slave trade in the 1790s and later in the internal slave trade](#); and [hiring out and relocation of enslaved people from eastern](#)

## Figure 58 continued

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Pettigrew Family Papers (collection number 00592)*

### Legacy Description

Johnston of Edenton, N.C., including unsuccessful efforts by the family to hold onto the plantations after the Civil War; slavery, especially William's use of slaves as overseers (some letters from slaves are included) and a thwarted slave rebellion planned for Hillsborough, N.C., in 1830...

### Conscious Editing

North Carolina to Chatham County, N.C., during the American Civil War. After the war, correspondents discuss their inability to hire Black laborers whom they had previously enslaved. Financial documents before the war include bills of sale for people trafficked in the internal slave trade and lists of people enslaved by the Pettigrews.

Records of Black people in this archive and information about their lives are obscured by the legacy description that focuses on white people and by the organizing principle of provenance that centered white people. Names of people enslaved by the Pettigrews are provided after conscious editing to make them visible in the archive. The new description focuses on the presence of Black lives in these papers, and historical details are provided for context. Details of the lived experiences of people who were enslaved are made explicit. The term "rebellion," which has negative connotations, is replaced with the terms "resistance" and "uprising," which imply a just cause and place the enslavers as the offenders. The racial identities of all actors have been added to the description in the interest of creating a more equitable archive.



## Figure 59

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Howard Washington Odum Papers (collection number 03167)*

### Legacy Description

Howard Washington Odum was a sociologist of the American South; author; professor at the University of North Carolina from 1920 to 1954; and founder of the Sociology Department, the School of Public Welfare, the Department of City and Carolina. The collection documents Howard Odum's active and varied career in sociology, race relations, regional planning, Jersey cattle breeding, and several regional national boards and commissions concerned with social and economic welfare, especially during the Roosevelt administration. There is very little material concerning Odum's formal education or his early career days in Philadelphia and Atlanta. The original deposits (circa 10,000 items) are arranged in six series: 1) Correspondence, chiefly 1925-1955, concerning the origin of the School of Public Welfare at the University of North Carolina; the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Atlanta, Ga... There are also letters from social researchers at universities and colleges throughout the United States responding to a request by Odum for their perspective on the term "poor white," seemingly research for a publication or project.

### Conscious Editing

The papers of [white sociologist Howard Washington Odum \(1884-1954\)](#) document his role in founding the Department of Sociology, School of Public Welfare, and Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina and chronicle his academic career; scholarly research interests, including [African American secular folk music; work in race relations in the American South](#), regional planning, and Jersey cattle breeding; and affiliations with regional and national councils and commissions that were concerned with social and economic welfare especially during the Great Depression, [murder by lynching, and what was contemporaneously called "interracial cooperation."](#) The collection contains professional correspondence with social science researchers, other scholars and academics, journalists, and civil rights and civic leaders; [reports from the Commission on Interracial Cooperation about mob terror and murders by lynching](#); speeches; published and unpublished writings; administrative files; organizational materials; newspaper clippings; printed items; teaching materials; research files, including a study Odum started on the term "poor whites" in 1938; and photographs including a sub-regional photographic study conducted by the Farm Security Administration from 1939 to 1940.

## Figure 59 continued

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Howard Washington Odum Papers (collection number 03167)*

Race identity has been added to the remediated description, as this is considered important for the discovery of collection material and context. In the interest of equity, both Odum's identity as a white sociologist and the description of secular folk music by African American artists has been added. Expanded information about the Commission on Interracial Cooperation to explain that the reports addressed "mob terror and murders by lynching" counteracts the erasure of racial violences in the archives. Key terms were added after conscious editing to aid discovery for people researching African American historical themes: "race relations in the American South," "civil rights and civic leaders," and "murder by lynching."

## Figure 60

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (Rowan County, N.C.) Records (collection number 05673)*

## Conscious Editing

Records of the [predominantly and historically white St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Rowan County, N.C.](#), include an 1840 document noting the church's consecration; an 1879 letter addressed to Rev. George Badger Wetmore from a congregant; a record book with entries dating from 1840 to 1889; and a booklet titled "St. Andrew's Episcopal Church The Sesquicentennial 1840-1990" by Elizabeth H. Etheridge. The record book contains reports delivered at diocesan conventions and information about the lay vestry; the church building and grounds; the congregants including lay women church workers; burials; and sacraments performed including baptism, confirmation, and matrimony. [Included in the antebellum baptismal records are the first names of enslaved people who received the sacrament with notations such as "colored servant" followed by the name of their enslaver.](#)

One of the ways we can reckon with the histories of our institutions is by explicitly naming them as "historically white" in our materials. This identifies them as direct by-products of systemic social and racial discrimination against African Americans and other people of color in the United States. Doing so provides necessary context when we attempt to identify additional content related to African Americans in our collections. The description notes that the first names of enslaved people are listed in the antebellum baptismal records, which aids discovery for genealogy researchers. A note related to these baptismal records helps readers to interpret potentially misleading language in the record book: it is made clear that "colored servant" is a person who was enslaved and that the name next to theirs in the record book is their enslaver.

## Figure 61

# Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Laura Spivey Massie Papers (collection number 05770)*

## Conscious Editing

Narrative about Summer Community Organization and Political Education (SCOPE) in Selma Ala., circa 1965-1966

Laura Spivey Massie's personal narrative about her participation in the SCLC sponsored voter registration drive in Selma, Ala., the summer following the Selma to Montgomery Marches in 1965. Massie alludes to the marches in her narrative and also comments on the murder of Viola Liuzzo during those demonstrations. [Liuzzo, a white woman from Detroit, Mich., was shot and killed while seated in a car with a young Black man, who was providing transportation for demonstrators.](#)

An equitable approach has been taken in naming the racial identities of actors in this collection by providing the white identity of Liuzzo and the Black identity of the young man in the car with her.

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## Discontinuing the Perpetuation of White Supremacy by Unhiding the Invisible Norm of Whiteness

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# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

To remove the invisible norm of Protestant Christianity, we should provide context and clarification about religious views to correct the assumption that the people represented in archival collections adhere to the views of a prominent Protestant Christian denomination unless otherwise stated. We should ensure that information provided about other Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, or other beliefs is relevant and accurate.

Although the first amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees citizens the freedom of religion, Protestant Christian denominations have predominated this country since European settlers began to arrive in the early 17th century. Described by religion scholar Dennis E. Owen as “the most religious and Protestant area of an extraordinarily religious nation,” the American South is correctly associated with Protestant Christian denominations such as Baptism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, and Episcopalianism. Although not everyone in the American South is a Protestant Christian, the religion’s prevalence has caused it to become the “invisible norm” of this region. Examples of this normalization are numerous; education professor Khyati Y. Joshi highlights Chick-fil-A offering free sandwiches to customers who bring in church bulletins and justifications for displaying the Ten Commandments on government property (Joshi, 2013, p. 190–193).

These examples highlight the rationalization that Christianity is so ubiquitous as to be beyond questioning or justification. Growing up in a southern city known as “the city of churches” because of the high number of churches per square mile, this article’s author assumed that everyone they met was a Protestant Christian unless told otherwise, despite their own family being Jewish and belonging to a local Jewish synagogue. They continued this assumption well into adulthood, despite knowing many people who belonged to other religions or who did not adhere to any religion, including their significant other.

Such ubiquity affects everyone. Whereas Protestant Christianity is heavily entwined in the history of the American South, it is erroneous to believe that everyone adheres to a Protestant denomination by default. An increasing number of southerners adhere to other religions, including Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam. Others do not affiliate with any established religion. Furthermore, the tendency to lump all Protestant Christians under the same umbrella fails to differentiate between the distinct denominations and suggests a homogeneity of religious, social, and political views that has never existed, creating the dynamic of “Protestant Christian” versus “Other.” Such “otherization” creates an echo chamber for Protestant Christians, causing people of other religions or who do not adhere to an established religion to constantly explain and justify their beliefs.

For example, whereas many Americans, regardless of religion or lack thereof, receive time off from school or work around the Christmas and Easter holidays, non-Christians are often forced to justify missing school, work, or other scheduled events to celebrate their own holidays.

Lastly, such ubiquity is entwined with “Lost Cause mythology” and other forms of white supremacy that used Christianity as a justification for enslavement. (Note that these ideas and justifications are not exclusive to Protestant Christian denominations.) Interpretations of Bible stories such as “the curse of Ham” (Genesis 9:20–27, King James Version) have been used to justify the enslavement of Black people and are still sometimes used as evidence that Black people are biologically inferior to people of other races.

Archival description in our collections often fails to identify religion or other beliefs in any form. For example, a search for the following terms in our finding aids conducted on 3 November 2020 returned the following number of results:

<i>Term</i>	<i>Results</i>
Agnostic	1
Atheist	3
Islam	11
Muslim	12
Sikh	1

Whereas Sikhism and Islam are not predominant religions in the American South, they are surely more prevalent in our collections than these search results indicate. Similarly, there are more atheists and agnostics in this region than these results suggest. Furthermore, there are materials in our collections that document people living outside the American South. For example, although the Arthur Franklin Raper Papers include materials documenting other countries (including Afghanistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Myanmar, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines), the description lacks any context about Raper’s own religion, the religion of the people he is documenting, and how his religion might influence his observations.

When information about religion is present, it typically falls into one of four categories:

1. Religion is described as a prominent topic of the collection, but the name of the religion is not mentioned. A predominant form of Protestant Christianity is assumed.
2. The description includes information about a person’s religion, but that information does not appear to be relevant to the materials in the collection. Such description is typically used to call out a non-Protestant form of Christianity, a form of Protestant Christianity not predominant in the American South, or a non-Christian religion.
3. The description includes misleading information about a religion that should be changed or clarified. Such a description might have been written by someone who did not know very much about the religion.
4. Religion is described as a prominent topic of the collection, and a religion is adequately identified.

Such description is typically found in finding aids created or revised since August 2017 and includes the following statement.

Since August 2017, we have added ethnic and racial identities for individuals and families represented in collections. To determine identity, we rely on self-identification; other information supplied to the repository by collection creators or sources; public records, press accounts, and secondary sources; and contextual information in the collection materials. Omissions of ethnic and racial identities in finding aids created or updated after August 2017 are an indication of insufficient information to make an educated guess or an individual's preference for identity information to be excluded from description. When we have misidentified, please let us know.

This guideline is needed to contextualize historical collections available in the Wilson Library, correcting the assumptions embedded in language that have been passed down and normalized. Similar to our past descriptive practice presuming whiteness by default, our past descriptive practice has, albeit to a lesser extent, presumed that people represented in our collections adhere to a denomination of Protestant Christianity unless otherwise stated. Of the examples listed in the previous section, only the last example provides an adequate amount of detail and context.

#### Failure to remove the invisible norm of Protestant Christianity

- both "otherizes" and ignores people who adhere to non-Christian religions (Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, etc.) or "other types" of Christianity (i.e., Catholicism, Moravianism, Quakerism);
- misrepresents atheist and agnostic individuals who do not adhere to a religion;
- suggests a homogeneity of religious, social, and political views among different Protestant Christian denominations that has never existed;
- supports the erroneous idea that the United States is a "Christian nation" founded on Christian principles and that people of other religions should be assimilated or leave; and
- ignores "Lost Cause mythology" and other forms of white supremacy that used Christianity as a justification for enslavement. (Note that these ideas and justifications are not exclusive to Protestant Christian denominations.)

As mentioned earlier, our description often fails to identify religion in any form. Since August 2017, TS has added ethnic, religious, and racial identities for individuals and families represented in collections. To determine identity, we rely on self-identification; other information supplied to the repository by collection creators or sources; public records, press accounts, and secondary sources; and contextual information in the collection materials. Omissions of ethnic, religious, and racial



identities in finding aids created or updated after August 2017 are an indication of insufficient information to make an educated guess or an individual's preference that identity information be excluded from description.

## Figure 62

# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Matthias Evans Manly Papers (collection number 00485)*

### Legacy Description

Matthias Evans Manly (12 April 1801-9 July 1881), lawyer and jurist, was born near Pittsboro, N.C., the third of six children of Elizabeth Maulsby and Basil Manly, who had moved to Chatham County from Bladen. His father was originally from St. Marys County, Md., and was Roman Catholic. His mother was a Quaker. Matthias Evans Manly was Roman Catholic.

### Conscious Editing

Matthias Evans Manly (12 April 1801-9 July 1881), a white lawyer and jurist, was born near Pittsboro, N.C., the third of six children of Elizabeth Maulsby and Basil Manly, who had moved to Chatham County, N.C. from Bladen County, N.C. His father was originally from St. Marys County, Md., and was Roman Catholic. His mother was a Quaker. Matthias Evans Manly was a Roman Catholic; however, his [religious views are not discussed in these papers.](#)

The biographical note states that Manly was a Roman Catholic and that his mother was a Quaker. Whereas this information is accurate and not problematic, his family's religious views are not contextualized, and it is plausible that religion would not have been mentioned at all had the family been identified as another denomination of Christianity, such as Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian. There is nothing in the description to suggest that Manly's religious views and practices are important to this collection. The information is retained such that Christianity is not assumed as an invisible norm, but the clause in the remediated description, "however, his religious views are not discussed in these papers," clarifies the relevance of his religious life in the context of this collection.

## Figure 63

# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Mordecai Family Papers (collection number 00847)*

### Legacy Description

The Addition of May 2012 contains a small handmade account book with manuscript entries, presumably made by Ellen Mordecai. The account book was laid in a published copy of *History of a Heart*, written by Ellen Mordecai and published in 1845. It is made up of eight pages, five with handwriting, plus paper wrappers, and is labeled on the cover, "Charity book 1846." Entries document contributions to charities and for religious purposes from the proceeds of sales of *History of a Heart*. Among the entries are contributions to poor women and children, [a Jewish missionary](#), an orphan asylum, and repairs to an old church.

### Conscious Editing

The Addition of May 2012 contains a small handmade account book with manuscript entries, presumably made by Ellen Mordecai. The account book was laid in a published copy of *History of a Heart*, written by Ellen Mordecai and published in 1845. It is made up of eight pages, five with handwriting, plus paper wrappers, and is labeled on the cover, "Charity book 1846." Entries document contributions from the proceeds of sales of *History of a Heart* to charities and Christian religious causes. Among the entries are listed charitable contributions to women and children experiencing poverty, [a Christian missionary organization that proselytized in Jewish communities](#), an orphan asylum, and repairs to an old [Christian](#) church.

The legacy description for the Ellen Mordecai account book includes mention of a "Jewish missionary." Whereas missionaries are common in Christianity, they are almost unheard of in Judaism. Based on the description in other parts of the finding aid not seen in the image, it is likely that the "Jewish missionary" refers to a person or organization that promotes Christianity to Jews, not the other way around. Even if this term was used in this account book, "Jewish missionary" is nonsensical to researchers familiar with Judaism and misleading to researchers who are not. Also, note the change to the phrase "poor women and children" to "women and children experiencing poverty" for a people-first approach to describing poverty.

## Figure 64

# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Cohen Family Papers (collection number 05178)*

## Conscious Editing

Samuel J. Cohen (“Jimmy”) and Luba Tooter Cohen, both [Jewish immigrants from Russia](#), were married in New York, N.Y., in 1920....The collection includes papers, family histories, photographs, home movies, and sound recordings relating to the Cohen, Tooter (also spelled Tudor), Dimand, and Freedman families, chiefly of Blytheville, Ark.; New London, Conn.; New York, N.Y.; and Minsk and Odessa, Russia....Family history materials include oral history interviews and transcripts, recorded by Marcie Cohen Ferris, that document [emigration of Russian Jews and their adjustment to life in the United States in the 1910s](#). Family photographs document children and adults at play and family gatherings from the early 1900s to the 1960s, Russian military dress in the 1910s...Other photographs document African American sharecroppers, cotton farming, and a hunting camp. Home movies, filmed by Jerry Cohen, record the history of significant construction and engineering projects of S. J. Cohen Company. [The films also record daily life in the Cohen family, including Temple Israel and the Jewish community of Blytheville.](#)

The consciously written abstract for the Cohen Family Papers prominently highlights that Jimmy and Luba Tooter Cohen were Jewish Russian immigrants. Later description mentions “daily life in the Cohen family, including Temple Israel and the Jewish community of Blytheville.” Adding information about religion to this finding aid makes sense because religious life and identity are relevant and important to this collection. Religious identity was likely supplied by the donor. If religious life and identity were not relevant and important to the collection, and if religious identity had not been supplied by the donor, such information would not necessarily need to be included in the finding aid.

## Figure 65

# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Alexander and Hillhouse Family Papers (collection number 00011)*

### Legacy Description

Alexander family correspondence focuses mostly on family and religion, though there is some information on business dealings. Sarah Alexander's correspondence illuminates the relationship between northern and southern women, documenting the lives of friends and family in Georgia, Connecticut, and New York. The correspondence of Adam Leopold Alexander (1803-1882) gives limited information on his financial affairs, but gives insights into his relationship with the people he enslaved and with free Black people.

### Conscious Editing

Alexander family correspondence focuses on family and religious practices. Correspondence indicates that members of the Alexander and Hillhouse [families were congregants of Protestant Christian churches](#). Sarah Alexander's correspondence illuminates the relationship between white northern and southern women, documenting the lives of friends and family in Georgia, Connecticut, and New York. The correspondence of Adam Leopold Alexander (1803-1882) gives limited information on his financial affairs, but does offer some information about the people he enslaved and free Black people he employed.

The religious affiliation of the Alexander family seems relevant to this collection given that the papers focus mainly on family and religion. By not mentioning a specific religious affiliation, a predominant form of Protestant Christianity is assumed, although we do not know what specific denomination of Protestant Christianity. The tendency to lump all Protestant Christians under the same umbrella fails to differentiate between the distinct denominations and suggests a homogeneity of religious, social, and political views that has never existed. Research can be conducted to discover the religious affiliation or denomination of the church they attended, and this should be made explicit in the remediated finding aid.

## Figure 66

# Removing the Invisible Norm of Protestant Christianity

*Excerpts from the finding aid of the Lord, Espy, Bacot Family Bible (collection number 02677)*

### Legacy Description

The collection is a [Bible](#) with birth and death dates for members of the Lord, Espy, and Bacot families of North Carolina.

### Conscious Editing

The collection contains a [publication year] copy of [publisher's name and title]. The bible includes handwritten birth and death dates for members of the Lord, Espy, and Bacot families of [city/county name], N.C. , including [names]. The bible does not include any information about the families' religious affiliations or list which churches the families attended.

The legacy finding aid for the Lord, Espy, Bacot Family Bible lacks any contextual information about the three families; the description provides no names of family members, no geographical locations associated with the families, and no religious affiliation or denominations relevant to the document, which is a Christian Bible. This lack of context likely means we did not have this information available to us when the collection was described. Research should be conducted, including using data provided in the Bible, to provide more contextual information. In the absence of specific information about the families' denomination, a statement should be added, such as the Bible does not include any information about the families' religious affiliations or list which churches the families attended.

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# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

Content warnings are “verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing” (University of Michigan, n.d.).

Content warnings refer to the language and content of the special collections materials themselves rather than the language created or published by library staff to describe these materials. Content warnings are most often applied in a presentation context, be it virtual or on-site. For special collections libraries, this may include digital collections, gallery exhibits, instructional courses, finding aids, bibliographic catalog records, or physical enclosures.

Content warnings are sometimes referred to as trigger warnings. However, trigger warnings are a specific variety of content warnings that attempt to forewarn audiences of content that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with post-traumatic stress disorder and other anxiety disorders. The following guideline is about content warnings in the broadest sense.

Content warnings may cover a wide variety of topics and subjects. An example of a prepared list of common topics can be found on the University of Michigan (n.d.) “An Introduction to Content Warnings and Trigger Warnings” site, which includes such topics as racism and racial slurs, violence, and animal cruelty or animal death, among other topics. It may be beneficial to have a library-wide policy that defines the topics, or scope of topics, that warrant content warnings. These topics should reflect the kinds of topics found in materials held at a library. Regardless of what topics a library chooses or prioritizes for content warnings, this policy should center the individuals or subjects of collection materials, as well as the needs of readers, listeners, or viewers of collection materials.

## Formats and Locations

When discussing content warnings in a special collections library context, it is also helpful to consider the variety of formats they may encompass and where they are located or published. Often, special collections libraries take a multitiered approach, publishing content warnings at an assortment of locations or levels. The following list includes a variety of formats and the potential locations where these kinds of statements may be found:

### **Content Warning**

Specific statements on harmful language or content that pertains to the individual item on display. The warnings may include a link to a library’s statement on harmful language or content. These statements are often published at the item level on finding aids, digital collections, or exhibit labels.



## **Boilerplate**

Abbreviated statements on harmful language or content that are applied broadly to collection materials. The same statement is used across many items and collections and does not identify specific content. These statements are often published on the digital collections home page, gallery exhibit entry plaques, finding aids, or item-level digitized content.

## **Statement**

Expanded statements on harmful language or content. These may include a value statement, contact information, and list of citations or resources. These statements are often published on a stand-alone web page.

## **Historical Context**

Expanded content warnings that include additional historical context on a specific topic or subject. These statements are often published on a stand-alone web page.

## **Documentation**

Published documentation used primarily by special collections library staff. These statements are often published or embedded into existing documentation on stand-alone web pages.

All departments in the Wilson Library are responsible in some form or another for providing access to material in our collections, which often involves the handling of challenging material: Wilson Library's archivists and librarians are the curators and stewards of exhibit spaces and collections that document the American South's violent and painful past of colonialism, forced removal of Indigenous peoples, enslavement, Jim Crow, white supremacy, and racism. This harmful content is prevalent in both bibliographic materials and archival collections.

We must all, therefore, take deliberate care to frame and present information about this harmful content in ways that will enable our users to prepare themselves adequately to engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own well-being; providing content warnings is one approach that helps with this.

However, we need to be mindful of the American Library Association's (ALA; 2015) opposition to the use of labeling systems that are meant to prejudice users: "Labeling as an attempt to prejudice attitudes is a censor's tool.... Prejudicial labels are designed to restrict access, based on a value judgment that the content, language, or themes of the resource, or the background or views of the creator(s) of the resource, render it inappropriate or offensive for all or certain groups of users."

Librarians and archivists in the Wilson Library regard the restriction of access to archival materials or the redaction or removal of text from documents or books as censorship; we would never do

this. Censorship blocks out certain elements of a document to deny access to the content, usually done on political or ideological grounds. Content warnings flag material to alert people to the nature of the content, but they never impact the actual work or collection itself. Tufts University's (n.d.) content warning policy states, "The presence of content warnings are not an indication of the item's availability for use in research, nor do the presence of content warnings serve to restrict an item's availability."

Descriptive content warnings at the access points to our library materials (exhibitions, finding aids, catalog records, web pages, digitized collections, enclosures) allow users to make informed decisions before viewing harmful material.

The description of materials written by librarians and archivists is crucial in order to inform and prepare researchers who will encounter harmful materials in our archival and special collections. This descriptive work may include adding historical context or a content warning that not only informs and prepares researchers for harmful content but also frames materials with compassion and care for the people documented in our collections and for the people who use our collections and our descriptive resources.

In the fall of 2020, Audiovisual Archivist Anne Wells and Library Assistant Meredith Kite conducted a survey of content warnings across special collections libraries in order to understand the evolving use of content warnings in a special collections library context. This survey, which was highly influenced by Violet Fox's "List of Statements on Bias in Library and Archives Description," attempted to unpack the various facets of content warnings used by special collections libraries, including their location(s) or how they were published, as well as the various types of content warnings used by special collections libraries, such as boilerplates, expanded statements, or item-level content warnings. An unexpected result of the survey included a more informal investigation of the tone or care evident in content warnings published by special collections libraries, including a look at who the statements centered—the institutions, people viewing or using collections, and/or people represented in collection materials.

## Special Collections Library Formats and Contexts

The following is further discussion of content warnings in specific special collections library formats and contexts—bibliographic materials, archival materials, exhibitions, and instruction. Whatever policy or practices library staff members establish regarding content warnings, they should both consider and incorporate these specific contexts while also acknowledging the common themes or threads among them.

### **Bibliographic Context**

Examples of racist and harmful content in bibliographic materials include yearbooks containing images of blackface and book titles containing racist slurs. In the Bibliographic Group of TS, we have not yet decided how to handle content warnings.

We could include a blanket warning in our catalog records stating that the materials may contain harmful language or content. This would be easy to apply but would appear so broadly that it would most likely be ignored by library users and thus wouldn't be effective.

We could include individual warnings on records for materials known to contain racist language or other harmful content.

We could also take an informational approach by calling out harmful content that appears in our materials without framing it as a warning to users. For instance, we could add a note to a bibliographic record that states, "Image of blackface appears on page 43."

One challenge with applying content warnings to bibliographic materials is the huge number (hundreds of thousands) of records that already appear in our catalog; it would be impossible to go back and assess all of those materials for harmful content. However, adding content warnings for new materials, as well as old ones that are brought to our attention, seems preferable to doing nothing.

Another consideration is whether we should add a subject heading or controlled vocabulary term of some sort to our records that will make instances of harmful content specifically searchable. In some cases, harmful language such as racial slurs will appear prominently in our description (rather than just on the item itself) because it is part of the title of the item described and cannot be removed or covered up without losing the ability to search by title.

## **Archival Context**

In an archival setting, content warnings appear as description in a collection's finding aid and/or as description within a digital collection or exhibit that displays digitized archival materials. TS Archival's description is guided by our "Principles for Ethical Description in Special Collections Technical Services," which steers the department's conscious editing and ethical description work.

Thus far, TS Archival has approached content warnings for racist and harmful content on a case-by-case basis, publishing content warnings in various levels or locations on the finding aid (examples can be found in the section "Content Warnings for Finding Aids").

TS Archival has not yet decided on a policy for content warnings across finding aids. In December 2020, the section launched a pilot for a ticketing or tracking system for the Library staff to submit known archival materials that are harmful.

## **Exhibitions Context**

Exhibitions are a good medium for bringing new narratives and messages to a wider and more general public in an accessible way. In the Wilson Library, we often use them to tell stories about our past from a range of perspectives to tackle prejudice and challenge dominant narratives that are partial and exclusory. Our choice to tackle challenging subjects that confront instances of racial

and ethnic violence and exclusion, as well as other forms of discrimination, bias, and inequity in the region's history, can result in displays of historical material that are harmful. This necessitates the use of content warnings at the entry point to our exhibitions, whether physical or digital.

## **Instruction Context**

In a classroom setting, a student has less control over the material they will encounter than if they are conducting independent research in the Wilson Library or choosing to view an exhibition. It is also potentially harder for them to get up and leave. Primary resources viewed in classes are in the raw; they are not filtered in any way to soften their impact. Images, often used in instruction in the Wilson Library, can have a more powerful effect than words.

Classes taught in the Learning Center in the Wilson Library begin with a review of a code of conduct for working with special collections, which includes a blanket content warning. Staff members explain that the Wilson Library was founded on racist beliefs and practices and, depending on the topic of the class, that students will be reviewing material that relates to incidences of racism, misogyny, violence against LGBTQ+ people, sexual violence, suicide, etc., much of which is emotionally challenging and potentially triggering content. In addition to the blanket warning given as an introduction, care is taken to keep graphic images in their folders and additional verbal warnings are given before students choose to look inside.

Special Collections Research and Instructional Services' (R&IS) decision to use content warnings is borne out of a duty of care and a commitment to inclusive teaching. However, despite being an increasingly common practice for teaching staff across university campuses, content warnings in the classroom remain controversial: "Critics argue that warning students that what they're studying could be 'triggering' will make professors less likely to teach sensitive material and render students too emotionally fragile to deal with the real world" (Nelson, 2016). The American Association of University Professors is also concerned that a culture that puts the protection of students above all else will ultimately undermine academic freedom and lead teachers to restrict what they teach to avoid upsetting students for fear of complaints. However, staff members at the Wilson Library are committed to reckoning with our past and do not whitewash history.

Exposing students to harmful content is considered key to the development of primary source literacy for students who are taught how to interrogate and interpret racist and otherwise prejudiced sources—to question when, why, and by whom they were created. Having said that, R&IS staff members adapt a curated set of material that contains harmful content depending on the level of the class. For example, for K-12 students, they would choose different materials than for college-aged students, even for the same subject.

Rather than regarding content warnings as devices that coddle students or censor content (by potentially encouraging students to avoid content), R&IS instructors regard content warnings as responsible pedagogy: "Trigger warnings are the opposite of this so-called infantilization—they tell students to hold themselves. They implicitly demand that students assess their own needs and take

responsibility for them...Overall, trigger warnings remind everybody, regardless of their personal history, to keep breathing, and to think carefully and compassionately about what they are learning. They indicate that learning is, and should be, challenging and that learning is, and should be, for everyone" (Gust, 2016). Content warnings are not restrictive; they are there precisely because potentially harmful material is being taught, and they are crucial for allowing students to use the necessary coping strategies.

In addition to the tiered approach to issuing verbal warnings used by R&IS librarians, the Inclusive Teaching (n.d.) website at the University of Michigan suggests adding a content warning to the class syllabus, posting a content warning on the class website (Sakai), or sending a warning to students ahead of the class via email. These methods require close collaboration with faculty members, some of whom take more control over class content than others.

Sometimes a list of resources is agreed upon—or requested by the professor—in advance, sometimes not. R&IS instructors work with faculty members to varying degrees depending on established relationships, the subject being taught, and the learning goals of the class. The implementation of content warnings in partnership with faculty members will likely have to be on a case-by-case basis.

Our use of content warnings aligns with the Honesty and Transparency values because we are making visible the biases and harmful ideologies that are exemplified in our collections. It also aligns with our Ethic of Care/People First values in that a content warning removes the element of surprise and/or shock and allows users to make choices about what to engage with and how to prevent unnecessary harm. Content warnings thereby ensure that users' information needs are addressed.

## Content Warnings for Exhibitions

In early 2020, we chose to incorporate a content warning into the introductory panel for the *Race Deconstructed: Science and the Making of Difference* exhibition in the Saltarelli Gallery of the Wilson Library.

We chose to begin with a descriptive statement and make no comment about how people may be impacted. We added a sentence to justify why we were exhibiting this material. We ended with an invitation to contact us with questions or concerns as part of our duty of care.

## Content Warnings for Digital Collections

NCDHC published its "Harmful Content on DigitalNC" statement as a stand-alone web page, "Harmful Content on DigitalNC," in October 2020.

NCDHC has also published content warnings at the item level for select partner materials, such as yearbooks that are known to contain blackface.

## Content Warnings for Finding Aids

Although there is no internal policy for content warnings in finding aids, TS Archival has applied content warnings to a small selection of archival materials as they became known. To date, content warnings have only been published in finding aids and do not extend to digital collections (CONTENTdm) pages.

## Further Actions

R&IS, TS, curatorial units, and exhibition staff members have all expressed an interest in sharing their practices to develop their approaches to writing and implementing content warnings. Here are some of the approaches that have been discussed:

We can more widely implement a ticketing system to allow staff and users to report harmful content that they encounter in our collections.

It is impossible to retrospectively add specific content warnings to all the necessary collections in a timely fashion. As a safety net, until remediation work can be completed, a generic boilerplate statement can be added to the appropriate virtual locations.

In addition to item-level warnings, the Wilson Library could devote a page on its website to a statement about the conscious editing work conducted by archivists to remediate past practice that we now know leads to the marginalization and exclusion of people in the historical record, and we can acknowledge that language and sentiments expressed in material in our collections is harmful. Important questions to ask about this statement are: Who is centered? Whose needs are our focus: the user's or the institution's? Who are we doing conscious editing work for?

This statement could include some or all of the following elements:

- A statement about content being a product of its time and place.
- A statement about the incompatibility of past content with the values of the Library/ University today.
- A statement clarifying that the Library does not endorse any beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, or behaviors depicted in its archives.
- A statement about the value of preserving and making the historical record available, even when harmful.
- A statement on language in archival description.
- An explanation of the remediation work being conducted by archivists to prevent harm through descriptive practices.
- An explanation of principles of equity and reconciliation by better identifying records of interest to marginalized and equity-seeking communities.
- An explanation of policy regarding the use of content warnings.
- An invitation to contact the Library to ask for remediation.

- An invitation to contact the Library for support if distressed by content.
- A statement about supporting the freedom of access to information to every user, citing ALA, Society of American Archivists, and Association of College and Research Libraries guidelines.

Displaying statements at the entrance points of exhibitions (including digital exhibitions) will become standard practice for exhibitions that feature collection materials that are racist, marginalizing, or dehumanizing as part of the narrative to expose difficult aspects of the past (or present) that we are now reckoning with. This work is iterative and would benefit from shared policies across departments.

## Figure 67

# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

*Exhibition content warning for Race Deconstructed: Science and the Making of Race, Melba Remig Saltarelli Room in the Wilson Library, 13 February to 12 March 2020*

## Conscious Editing

This exhibition includes historical attitudes about race that are offensive and dehumanizing. We present these items in order to provide a more complete and critical examination of the past.

If you have questions or concerns about the contents of this exhibit, we invite you to contact us at [wilsonlibraryexhibitions@office.unc.edu](mailto:wilsonlibraryexhibitions@office.unc.edu).

Content warning added to the introductory panel for the *Race Deconstructed: Science and the Making of Race* exhibition in the Melba Remig Saltarelli Room in the Wilson Library, 13 February to 12 March 2020. This information was placed at the entry points to the exhibition. It warns visitors, explains the choice to include harmful content, and invites visitors to contact the Library with questions or concerns. We chose to begin with a descriptive statement and make no comment about how people may be impacted. We added a sentence to justify why we were exhibiting this material. We ended with an invitation to contact us with questions or concerns as part of our duty of care.



## Figure 68

# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

*"Harmful Content on DigitalNC" page under "Policies" in the "About" section of the DigitalNC web pages (<https://www.digitalnc.org/policies/harmful-content-on-digitalnc/>)*

## Conscious Editing

Harmful Content on DigitalNC

Dear visitor,

DigitalNC includes historical materials that our partners have selected to make more broadly available. We believe providing broad access to North Carolina's historical record is important for teaching, learning, research, and social change. You may encounter terms or images that are hurtful to you or set off strong emotional responses. We share this message because we care about your experience on the site and want to strike a balance between transparency, access, and inclusivity for our users. Please contact us if you'd like to talk further.

The NCDHC Team

DigitalNC's statement about harmful content on their web pages is in the "About" section under "Policies," although the message is intended for users and is addressed directly to visitors. It justifies the existence of the harmful content but centers users and their well-being. It invites visitors to contact NCDHC staff to talk further.

## Figure 69

# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

DigitalNC web page for Gray Matter, the college yearbook for the Wake Forest University School of Medicine (<https://lib.digitalinc.org/record/38702#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&r=0&xywh=-1837%2C-195%2C6363%2C3866>)

### Legacy Description

Title: Gray Matter [2012]

Standard School: Wake Forest School of Medicine

Name: Wake Forest University. School of Medicine.

Creator: 2012

Date (Text): 2012

Date:

Geographic Coverage: Winston-Salem (N.C.); Forsyth County (N.C.)

Subject (Topic): College yearbooks--North Carolina--Winston-Salem.

Subject (Name): Wake Forest University. School of Medicine--Periodicals. Wake Forest University. School of Medicine--Students--Yearbooks.

Type: Text

Format: Yearbooks

Language: English

Digital Exhibit: North Carolina College and University Yearbooks

Internet Archive ID: graymatter2012wake

### Conscious Editing

Usage Statement: Blackface was and is culturally insensitive and racist. This and similar materials in this collection do not mirror the views of Wake Forest School of Medicine, but serves as a portrayal of the social mindsets and occurrences of the time that it was produced.

Standard Rights Statement: <http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0/>

Contributing Institution: Wake Forest School of Medicine

## Figure 70

### Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

*DigitalNC web page for Gray Matter, the college yearbook for the Wake Forest University School of Medicine (<https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/38702#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&r=0&xywh=-1837%2C-195%2C6363%2C3866>)*

Labeled as a "Usage Statement," this message at the item level warns of the presence of blackface in the resource, emphasizing that this and similar content are incompatible with the values of the University today.

## Figure 71

# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Robert D. Bethke Collection (collection number 20466)*

## Conscious Editing

“Gonna Have a Hog Killing”

dubbed Super 8 footage

U-Matic

Created by David DeWitt

Video documents the slaughter, processing, and butchery of a pig. Images include animal death and blood.

A note at the item level describes challenging content and warns viewers of images of animal death and blood.

## Figure 72

# Warning Users About Racist and Harmful Content

*Excerpt from the finding aid of the Federal Writers' Project Papers (collection number 03709)*

## Conscious Editing

Collection level:

Processing Note: Select documents, titles, and description found in this collection contain harmful and racist language used by the creators of these documents. In 2020, archivists removed transcriptions of the harmful portions of the titles from the finding aid and replaced them with [racist slur]. The original titles remain on the physical documents and digitized access copies. We have not removed racial terms “Negro” or “Colored” because we feel they provide important historical context about the materials and who created them and they facilitate the research process. We recognize that these terms also may cause harm and will periodically revisit our decision to include them. We recognize the complexity of this issue and welcome feedback on this decision at [wilsonlibrary@unc.edu](mailto:wilsonlibrary@unc.edu).

Item level:

Brown and Northrop (interviewers): “I Used To Be a Bad [racist slur]”

Processing Note: Transcription of original title amended in the finding aid by archivists in 2020 to remove harmful language. The original title remains on the physical documents and digitized access copies.

Mattie Johnson, no date given, no place given, Black wash woman, Charlotte, 23 May 1939.

Examples of processing notes at the collection and item levels describing the decisions to remove racist slurs and replace them with “[racist slur]” in transcriptions of titles in finding aids. These processing notes act as a warning to users of offensive and harmful content, especially that the original title remains on the physical documents and digitized access copies.

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## On Cultural Humility

*A Guide to Conscious Editing at Wilson Special Collections Library* demonstrates the University Library's commitment to cultural humility. This approach allows editors, contributors, thinkers, and doers to escape the finite boxes of *cultural knowledge* associated with its twin concept: *cultural competency*. As Andrews et al. (2018) note, "Cultural competency is not something that can be obtained for all time, nor is it a series of dehumanizing checklists" (p. 20). *A Guide to Conscious Editing* intentionally repositions our approach away from thinking of ourselves—and the work of conscious editing—as experts in monolithic cultural knowledge. With a slight, yet important, rhetorical shift, *cultural humility* works to center the process rather than the attainment: "Cultural humility is an ongoing process that focuses on three things: self-valuation of one's own background and expectations, committing to redress power imbalances, and building relationships" (Andrews et al., p. 20). The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University Libraries' commitment to cultural humility reminds us that our goal is not to achieve perfect solutions but rather to engage in the continuous process of learning, critical self-reflection, and growth.

It is important to place *A Guide to Conscious Editing* and the concept of cultural humility within the context of the Library's Reckoning Initiative, which challenges us as library and archival workers to account for the past, to redress silences and harm in the historical record, and to perform reparative work that leads to justice for all oppressed peoples. Librarians and archivists cannot operate under the presumption that they (and only they) know what is important to all peoples and cultures. An approach of cultural humility, as with the work of conscious editing, forces us to wrestle with critical questions: How might we honor the lived experiences and knowledge of the marginalized in our library collections? How might we dismantle oppressive structures without using the trappings of white supremacy? How do we build and create a system that is justice-oriented and derived? Tangling with these questions, and being comfortable with the process and with the unknowing, is at the very heart of our cultural humility approach.

We invite you, our readers, to join us in the process and to take part in conversation, learning, and reflection.

# Conscious Editing Vision and Values

The librarians and archivists at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) are the curators and stewards of exhibit spaces and collections that document peoples from a multiplicity of geographical regions, cultural groups, and historical time periods, with a significant focus on the peoples of the American South. We acknowledge the presence—and absence—of marginalized voices throughout these collections while also highlighting the specific impact of the American South's violent and painful history of colonialism, forced removal of Indigenous peoples, enslavement, Jim Crow, white supremacy, and racism. We recognize the enormous responsibility we have not only in collecting a diversity of voices and perspectives but also in composing, framing, and presenting descriptive information about collections and shaping the physical and virtual spaces where the collections are accessed and where people visit to connect with the past.

Conscious editing is an ethos of care employed in the development, composition, and ongoing refinement of texts and nontextual presentations of information. As library and information professionals and public historians, we understand the power of both language and visual information and the need to take deliberate care in creating and relaying both. We approach this work with humility, knowing that we carry biases as individuals and as staff members in a historically white institution and that we will err frequently.

## Our Vision

People connect with the past without the impediments created by structural racism, bigotry, discrimination, and privilege.

University Libraries at UNC-Chapel Hill supports truth and reconciliation movements that engage communities and challenge historical narratives, which have erased or silenced people and cultures.

University Libraries at UNC-Chapel Hill and other traditional centers of power reckon with difficult pasts and launch meaningful and far-reaching reparations programs and funds.

## Our Values

### **Ethic of Care/People First**

We commit to collaborating with people within and outside of our institution to ensure that their information needs are addressed, recognizing that their needs may not align with our understandings or institutional goals.

We acknowledge the challenges of understanding and valuing different ways of knowing in our approaches to collection management, description, access, and exhibition.

## **Accessibility**

We aim to remove barriers that prevent people from achieving their goals in the Library.

We create and continuously refine texts with language that is plain, direct, nuanced, and humane.

## **Honesty and Transparency**

We commit to illuminating the violences and biases that built and sustain the University, the Library, and the library collections.

We commit to clarifying oppressive and racist distortions of the American South's history and culture.

## **Equity**

We seek to center and re-center the voices of the silenced, marginalized, and unheard and to approach work with respect for those whose lives are reflected in the collections we steward.

We seek to frame and reframe narratives for equity with a critical awareness of our inherent biases.

# Abbreviations and Initialisms

Alternative text.....	Alt-text
American Library Association.....	ALA
Describing Archives: A Content Standard.....	DACS
Library of Congress Subject Headings.....	LCSH
North Carolina Digital Heritage Center.....	NCDHC
Resource Description and Access.....	RDA
Social Networks and Archival Context.....	SNAC
Southern Historical Collection.....	SHC
Special Collections Research and Instructional Services.....	R&IS
Special Collections Technical Services.....	Technical Services (also TS)
Technical Services Archival Section.....	TS Archival
Subject Authority Cooperative Program.....	SACO
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.....	UNC-Chapel Hill
Triangle Research Libraries Network .....	TRLN
Wilson Special Collections Library.....	Wilson Library

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