

This project is made possible in part by  
a Library Services and Technology Act  
grant from the Institute of Museum  
and Library Services.



*Southeast* **2022**  
**COLLABORATIVE**  
ONLINE CONFERENCE

# Critical Cataloging: What? Why? How?

Alyssa Nance  
Tiffany Henry  
Anna Craft



*Southeast* **2022**  
**COLLABORATIVE**  
ONLINE CONFERENCE



# Critical cataloging: What? Why? How?

March 17, 2022.

Slides: <https://go.uncg.edu/scoc2022>

Southeast Collaborative Online Conference



# Presenters



**Alyssa Nance**

She/Her

Institutional  
Repository  
Metadata Analyst



**Tiffany Henry**

She/Her

Discovery  
Cataloger



**Anna Craft**

She/Her

Coordinator of  
Scholarly  
Communications

# Land acknowledgement

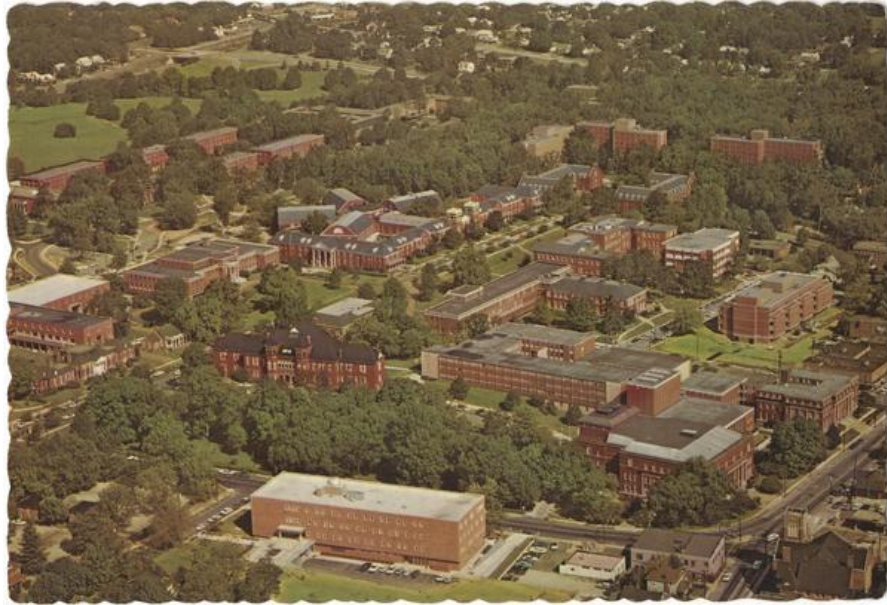


Image credit: "Aerial view of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro" in 037: Campus Views - Aerial (1950-1989), Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. 1972.

**We acknowledge that the land we are gathered on has long served as the site of meeting and exchange amongst a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Eno, Keyauwee, Occaneechi, Saura, and Shakori. We also want to acknowledge the long history and lasting legacies of slavery on these lands.**


# Welcome!

We're here to talk about learning to implement critical cataloging practices in our department

But first, some background about critical theory, critical librarianship, and critical cataloging!




# **Critical theory**



Critical theory is a social theory that examines the constraints of society and culture, assuming that by explaining and understanding them we promote rationality, freedom, individuality and community.

(Cluley, 2011)





Critical theory switches the question of truth into a question of power. It tries to unmask the power relationships that lie behind our ideas of what is true.

(Cluley, 2011)

# Critical theory

- We – individuals, cultures, institutions – are a product of our own histories
- In order to make effective change, we must understand the current conditions & nuances of power
- How do our current systems of power reflect and reinforce the oppression we can see in our histories?

# Oppression

- Power is wielded to create ***oppression***
- Design of spaces, objects, infrastructure
- Public goods & services
- Financial & criminal systems
- Medical bias
- Increasing complexity of oppression is ***intersectionality***

# Privilege

- **Privilege** refers to the experience of not being oppressed
- Life may be hard, but not because systems are stacked against people like you
- Many types of privilege; people may be oppressed in some ways but have privilege in others

# White supremacy & racism

- Question reflexive defensiveness
- Embeddedness of racial bias and oppression in our institutions and culture
- Goes beyond the explicit, overt racism of white supremacists
- Often insidious and hidden -- thus the need for critical analysis
- [Leung & López-McKnight \(Eds.\), 2021](#)



# **Critical librarianship**

# Principles of crit lib

## Critical librarianship ([Drabinski, 2019](#)):

- Interrogates the work of power in structures and systems
- Acknowledges the social, economic, and political context of library policies and processes
- Surfaces hidden labor
- Articulates the infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others
- Knows that the world could be different

# **A critical eye on libraries & archives**

- Physical & digital accessibility
- Types, timing, & accessibility of programming
- Collection development
- Sensitive cultural materials
- Organization & description
- Public policies



# Interrogating libraries

- How might disability or socioeconomic status impact a user's ability to access library spaces, programs, or materials?
- Do any fees or building/resource usage policies impact some people more than others?
- Are all users able to find and use what they need, without experiencing harm?

## **Crit lib in action**


- Abolishing overdue fines
- Contracting with truly accessible digital vendors
- Crafting equitable collection development and user policies
- Employee policies and workplace culture
- Critical evaluation of information organization and description



# **Critical cataloging**


# Critical cataloging

- Offshoot of both critical librarianship & radical cataloging
- Critical cataloging is a subset of radical cataloging
  - Watson (2020)



“Being user focused with regard to *your* library’s users  
...having a healthy dose of skepticism about the  
quality of readily available bibliographic  
records...knowing when and how to make cataloging  
decisions that may conflict with traditional cataloging  
standards...”

(Roberto, 2008)



“...social justice-oriented style of radical cataloging that places an emphasis on radical empathy, outreach work, and recognizes the importance of information maintenance and care.”

(Watson, 2020)

# Background

Prejudices and antipathies: a tract on the LC subject heads concerning people  
(1971 & 1993)

- Sanford Berman

Other scholars

- Adler (2017)
- Drabinski (2013)
- Olson (2001)


Radical cataloging: Essays at the front (2008)

- K.R. Roberto (Ed.)



# **Critical cataloging and the library**





How can critical cataloging connect to and impact the library and its users – in technical services and beyond?

# Does your library...?

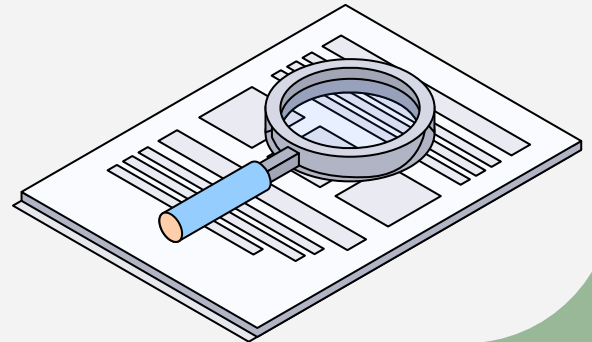
- 1.** Help users find, identify, select, and obtain materials?
- 2.** Strive to mitigate harm to library personnel and to users?
- 3.** Engage in efforts to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion?

# Critical cataloging practices can help:

1. Improve access to resources and discovery
2. Mitigate harm to both library users and library personnel
3. Critically examine the value of neutrality
4. Promote inclusion

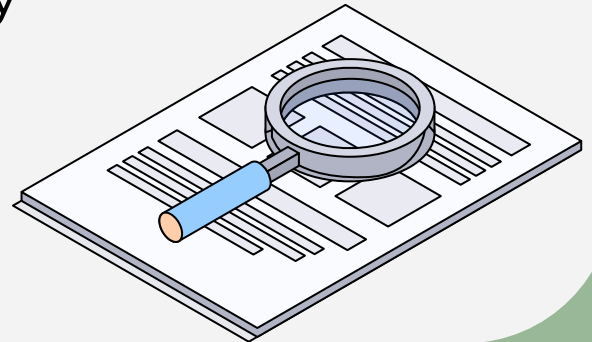
# Access & discovery

- Improved discovery of resources
- Ensuring relevant language for searching
- Accurate & respectful name authority data



# Mitigating harm

- Library users and staff members might encounter harmful language
- Work to reduce and mitigate needed to increase inclusivity

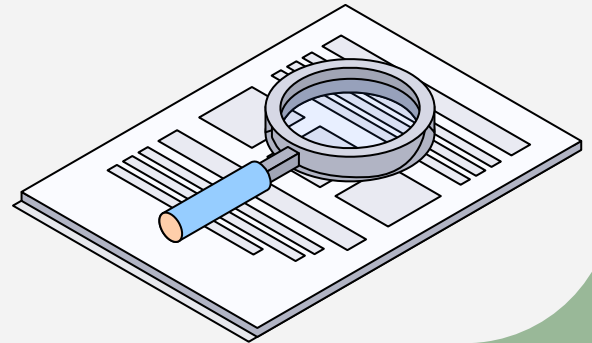


# On values, neutrality, & inclusion

- Critical cataloging encourages questioning & even challenging assumed professional values
- Neutrality of libraries challenged (de Jesus [2014](#))
- Neutrality in cataloging in place to promote objectivity

# On values, neutrality, & inclusion

- Neutrality in cataloging practice works against harm mitigation
- Critical cataloging to help promote inclusion as a professional value



# Critical Cataloging Connections

- Reference and instruction
  - Access and discovery
- Special collections & archives
  - Harm mitigation in description
  - Challenge neutrality of historical record
- User experience
  - Positive user experiences
  - Promote use of resources



**Opportunities to  
implement critical  
cataloging concepts**

# Name authority work

- Ethical issues:
  - Creator privacy
  - Recording gender
  - Culturally appropriate ways to capture data
- Recommended resource
  - [Ethical questions in name authority control](#)  
(J. Sandberg, ed., 2019)

# LCSH

- Keep imported records up-to-date
- New LCSH proposals (Non-LC/non-SACO guide by Beck Schaefer)
- Utilize ILS & Discovery layer tools:
  - TRLN subject remapping

# Alternative vocabularies

- Many vocabularies have MARC codes and can be used in WorldCat records
- Don't forget about other LC vocabularies
- Resources at The Cataloging Lab may help you find a vocabulary that will fit your needs

# Special collections & archives

- Redescription & reorganization projects
  - Reparative Archives Project at UNCG
  - Automated auditing archival description for harmful language project at Duke Univ.
- Offensive Materials and Language Statement
  - Now included on collection descriptions & finding aids



**Getting started  
with critical  
cataloging at UNCG**

# Technical Services at UNCG

- Department created in 2016 by merging Acquisitions and Cataloging
- 17 FTE, including faculty, staff, and temporary positions
- We're not experts on critical librarianship or critical cataloging, but we're actively working on learning

# How does Tech Services support EDI efforts at UNCG?

- Diversity audits of collections
- Participation in Reparative Archives Working Group
- Professional development and learning; following developments and changes in the profession
- Actively working on skills and practices in specific areas--critical cataloging and metadata remediation





**We want to learn more about  
critical cataloging and  
improve our practices and  
skills**

**So we are pursuing projects that will give  
us that hands-on experience**

# Cutter project

- Idea to remediate the LCC call numbers in use impacted by the recent .N cutter change
- Planning & logistics:
  - Determining workflow
  - Interdepartmental effort
- Challenges: time, upcoming building renovation
- Establishing process will prepare us for future changes



A quick note:

*Critical cataloging* work doesn't always involve MARC records and traditional bibliographic description.

These practices can also apply with other types of description, including non-MARC metadata

# The Robert C. Hansen Performing Arts Collection: historical sheet music subset

- Dates from the 1840s-1920s (bulk 1900-1929)
- Sheet music, primarily songs
- Most items include cover art
- Many include advertisements for other musical compositions and/or excerpts of other songs
- Digitized and available online:
  - <https://gateway.uncg.edu/islandora/object/mss%3AMSS0255>

# BE MY LITTLE BABY BUMBLE BEE

WORDS BY  
STANLEY MURPHY

AS SUNG BY  
BRICE AND KING

MUSIC BY  
HENRY I. MARSHALL

## IN ZIEGFELD MOULIN ROUGE

FORMERLY NEW YORK THEATRE  
F. ZIEGFELD JR'S Production

### "A WINSOME WIDOW"

WITH

STAGED BY

# BIMINI BAY

SONG BY THE WRITERS OF  
"AINT WE GOT FUN"

LYRIC BY  
GUS KAHN &  
RAYMOND B. EGAN

MUSIC BY  
RICHARD A.  
WHITING



VOICE.

Queen - ie bee lived  
Wil - lie, he flew

*Vamp*

*mf* *p*

Musical score for the first system. It features a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The lyrics are "Queen - ie bee lived / Wil - lie, he flew". Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef). The piano part includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *p*, and a *Vamp* instruction.

o'er the lee And she was a bun - ny lit - tle hon - ey bee.  
o'er the lee To call on her ma - ma and her pa - pa bee.

Musical score for the second system. It features a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The lyrics are "o'er the lee And she was a bun - ny lit - tle hon - ey bee. / o'er the lee To call on her ma - ma and her pa - pa bee." Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef).

EVERYONE INTERESTED IN MUSIC SHOULD  
HAVE THESE VALUABLE BOOKS.



GEO. L. SPAULDING'S  
NOTE-SPELLER

Trade Mark Registered 1911

THIS is a new system of learning rapidly to read and write the notes in music and is destined to revolutionize modern elementary methods. The "NOTE-SPELLER" will prove a most valuable adjunct to any course of musical instruction, and will be found indispensable in the studio, class-

**Not pictured: many examples of objectionable images, words, and phrases**

# Hansen Collection metadata work, 2011

- Author name clean-up in digital collections metadata
- Addition of LCSH to records in digital collection
- Addressing other minor metadata and digital file issues as they were encountered



**2011 was a different time!**



# Sheet music metadata work, 2011

## Did:

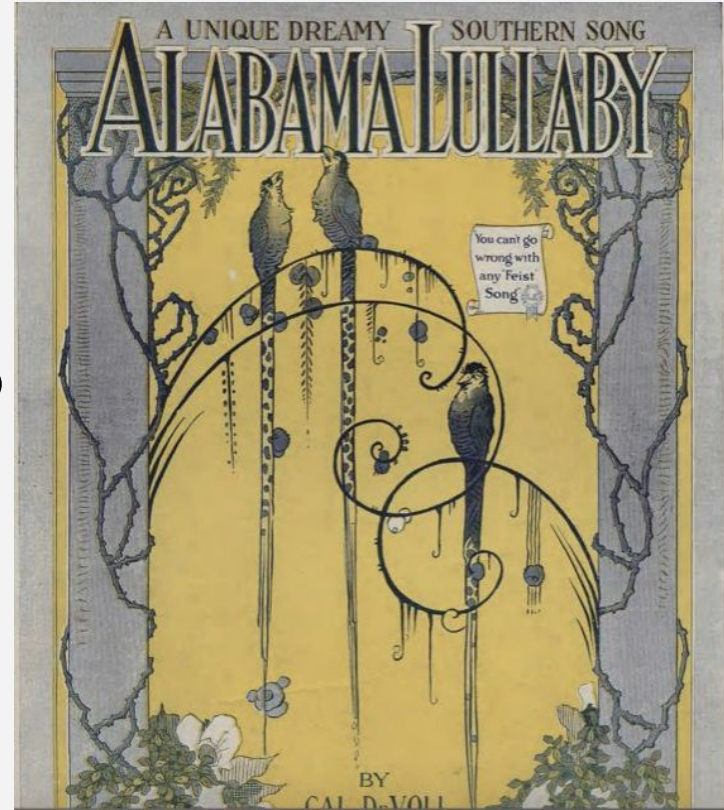
- Notice problematic aspects of images, terms, etc within collection materials
- Feel uncomfortable with some of the collection contents
- Follow expected workflows and practices
- Finish the project & move on

## Didn't:

- Discuss the problematic aspects
- Consider the possibility of addressing the issues we found
- Question the practices we had in place
- Think about it much once we were done, *until....*

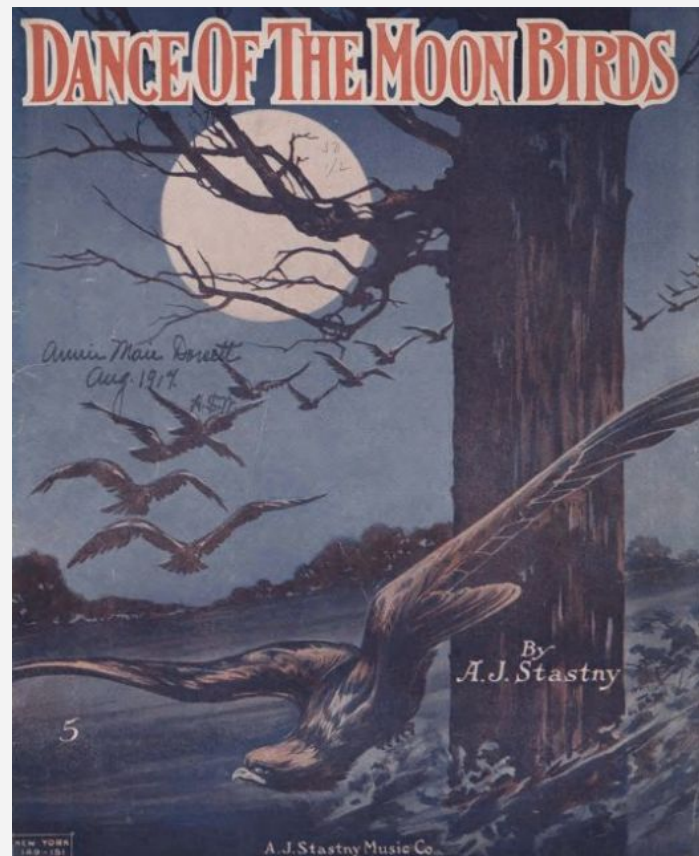
# Hansen Collection metadata work, 2021-22

- Specifically looking to provide more respectful and accurate metadata
- Considering critical cataloging practices and looking for ways to implement them
- Addressing other minor metadata and digital file issues as they are encountered
- Still in progress!



# Why the Hansen collection?

- Many examples of problematic content and/or description = Many opportunities to provide more accurate and respectful language
- Manageable size (~500 items)
- Opportunities to learn from others in the profession who have similar collections



## How have we approached this project?

- Reading relevant articles and other literature, attending webinars and conference sessions
- Seeking out examples of similar collections to see how other institutions have handled them
- Talking to personnel at other libraries who are active in this work
- Applying what we've learned to our project

# Project spreadsheet example

Title	Title	Text	Art	Other (describe)	Notes	Issue grouping
The Memphis Blues		X	X		The cover has a man in blackface; racist lyrics	racism
The Merry Widow Waltzes (Die Lustige Witwe Walzer)					instrumental	
The Message of the Honeymoon			X		Racist/caricatured depictions of Black people on the cover art	racism
The Navy of the U.S.A.						
The Ragtime Pipe of Pan						
The Red Lantern		X	X		Racist art and lyrics	Racism

# What kind of issues have we identified?

- Racism - particularly against Black people
  - Blackface art, minstrelsy
  - Legacy of slavery
  - Other racist language and/or images
- Colonialism, exoticism, orientalism, xenophobia
- Misogyny, sexism
- Disparaging language and/or images targeting racial, ethnic, and other minority groups

# Minstrelsy & blackface headings

- LCSH
  - Minstrel music
  - Minstrel shows
  - Blackface entertainers
  - Blackface
- [Minstrelsy description \(Berry\)](#)
- LCGFT
  - Minstrel music
  - Minstrel shows
- RBMS
  - Minstrel jokes
  - Minstrel songs

# Difficult-to-remediate issues

- Colonialism
- Exoticism
- Misogyny, sexism
- Orientalism
- Xenophobia
- Satisfactory terms expressing these concepts are often not established in CVs
- These issues are often subtle, coded, and passing



# LCSH issues

- Genre vs. subject (is-ness vs. about-ness)
  - Using LCSH “off-label” for genre/form terms
    - ▷ Blackface
  - Using LCSH to describe contents
    - ▷ Racism against Blacks

# More LCSH issues

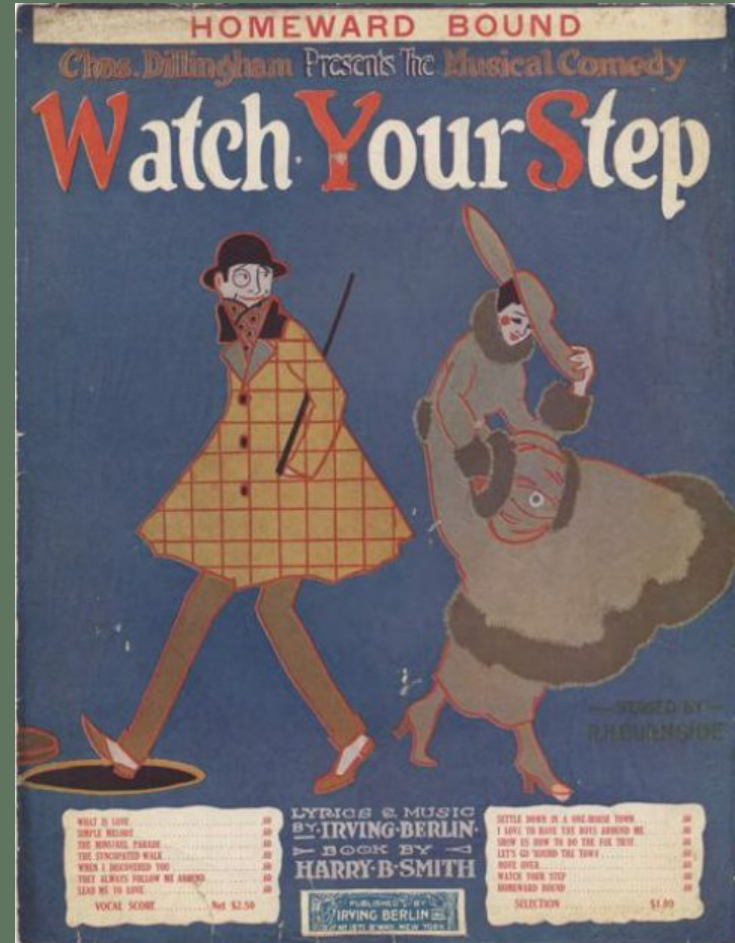
- --Songs and music
  - “Use as a form subdivision [...] under classes of persons, ethnic groups [...] for collections or single works of vocal or instrumental music about the subject.”
- African Americans--Songs and music
  - Are these songs actually about Black people, or are they about a racist stereotype of Black people?

# Potential solutions

- AAT
  - exoticism
  - racial discrimination
  - Orientalism
  - sex discrimination
- LCGFT
  - Humorous songs
- RBMS
  - Caricatures
- TGM
  - Ethnic stereotypes

# Next steps

- Select, review, finalize new headings
- Ensure new vocabularies will be imported correctly
- Submit entire batch to replace existing metadata
- Consider practices and workflows for future collections and projects



# What have we learned?

- Historical context about this collection and its era
- Problematic content can't always be put in a box
- We often need to question our assumptions about and understandings of the materials & creators
- Not all the issues we've flagged will be addressed through metadata remediation
- This work is a process



**Wrapping up:  
Challenges and  
opportunities for  
involvement**

# Challenges to incorporating critical cataloging

- **TIME**

- Competing projects & regular duties; we can't always prioritize critical cataloging work
- UNCG: impending major building renovation

- **Expertise:** There are many learning opportunities, but building expertise also takes time!

- **Buy-in & support from workplace**

# Thinking about getting involved in critical cataloging work?

- Needed: willingness to learn, willingness to question assumptions and practices while working toward reducing harm and increasing inclusivity
- You don't have to have a blatantly offensive collection to do this work
- Seek out learning opportunities:
  - <https://go.uncg.edu/scocres>



## **A final thought:**

We've talked about some individual projects that are part of our exploration of critical cataloging work, but our work in this area won't stop when those projects are complete.

This effort is about building a practice and culture that will hopefully extend beyond just these projects and into the larger department and library.

# THANKS!

## Any questions?

Alyssa: [manance2@uncg.edu](mailto:manance2@uncg.edu)

Tiffany: [tnhenry@uncg.edu](mailto:tnhenry@uncg.edu)

Anna: [arcraft@uncg.edu](mailto:arcraft@uncg.edu)

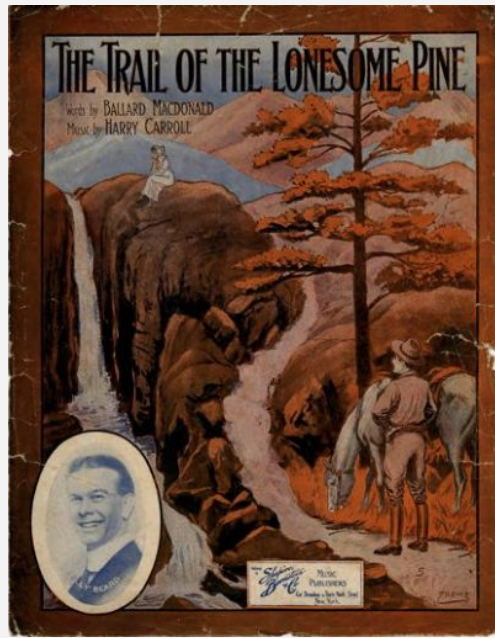
Slides: <https://go.uncg.edu/scoc2022>

Resources and works cited:  
<https://go.uncg.edu/scocres>

# Examples of objectionable materials

- Racism - particularly against Black people
  - Blackface art
  - Blackface minstrelsy
  - Legacy of slavery
  - Other racist language and/or images
- Colonialism
- Exoticism
- Misogyny, sexism
- Orientalism
- Xenophobia
- Disparaging language and/or images targeting racial, ethnic, and other minority groups

# Attribution (and thanks again!)



CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**

Please keep this slide for attribution