Reparative Archives by Shelbi Webb

Purpose: present 2021 Capstone Project known as Reparative Archives Working Group (RAWG) in which I teamed up with UNC Greensboro’s Special Collections & University Archives to review finding aids to locate and remove culturally insensitive words and phrases. I documented the process in a LibGuide for others to view as a possible path to their own reparative archive projects.

What Was Done

- Finding Aids Workflow Record Google sheet made, shared among RAWG group & updated in real time.
- Only collection level descriptions reviewed due to the time constraints.
- Problematic finding aids published online were downloaded for preservation, then fixed in the following sections: Scope & Contents, Biographical/Historical Note, and the Abstract.
- ArchiveSpace served as the interface for handling the finding aids.

To see RAWG Goal’s, use this QR Code

Findings

- Euphemisms
  - Racist language, tone, & POV
  - Shapes distorted colonial narratives
  - Espouses misinformation

- Creator’s Positionality
  - Context of info creation matters
  - Creators’ backgrounds matters

- Positionality Resolution
  - Placing info & its creators into context, so time period matters
  - Creators from the hegemony studying marginalized peoples
  - Upholds colonial structures of controlling image/voice of minorities
  - Presents power imbalance

- Valorizing Language
  - Needless language that boosts images of collection creators –
  - White men = traditional, central figure of collections
  - To boost their image is to boost their supremacy
  - The victors tell the story & make themselves look good

- Valorizing Language Resolution
  - Valorizing Lang. Deleted - stick to the pertinent facts

- Euphemism Resolution
  - Replace offensive terms with narratives

- Valorizing Language
  - Progressive language that corrects mistakes

- Positionality Resolution
  - Placing info & its creators into context, so time period matters

- Creators from the hegemony studying marginalized peoples

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Why Do It

- Archives shape history & society
- The words we use matter
- Change descriptions that distort & erase minorities
- Act of reparative archives improves info accuracy & society

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Articles

- Anti-colonialist resources for reparative archives
- Highlights how archives uphold colonial structures
- Participatory Archives boost Inclusivity
- Turn archives into an advocate of social justice
- Espouses importance of cultural humility

Future Considerations

Preventative Measures
- Copy-Cataloging Warning: Past descriptions may hold colonialisms
- Partner w/source communities based on cultural humility
- Prioritize source ownership
- Source communities control info mgmt.

Ongoing Measures
- Crowdsourcing Note: The Sensitivity Statement asks users to call out your institution = Chance for Change
- If Partnering w/Source communities, Pay them

Post-Custodialism

- Video Interview of Black Lives Matter Collection curators
- Highlights their deference to & collaboration w/source comm. in collecting & describing artifacts
- Shows archival practice shift from issues ID’d in RAWG review to post-custodial practices incorporated now

Speech Video: “Decolonizing archival practice and diversifying the historical record through post-custodial human rights archiving”