Anti-Racist Description Working Group

For GRI Archives and Special Formats

[Revised 03/23/2021]

<u>Founding Members</u>

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<u>Mission & Scope</u>

The working group was formed to address and rectify biased language, distortion, and the erasure of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) lives in the descriptions of archives and special formats in Institutional Archives (IA) and in Special Collections Cataloging (SCC) at the Getty Research Institute. The founding members of the working group consist of a majority of white women at a predominately white institution (PWI).[1] There are no Black archivists among the founding members of the working group. As such, we acknowledge that our understanding of racism and anti-Blackness in archival description is incomplete, will continue to evolve, and will necessitate an iterative approach to remediation. It should also be noted that the overrepresentation of whiteness and femaleness in the working group reflects demographic imbalances in the library and archives fields nationwide.[2]

Archives and special formats in this context refers to archival collections and rare and unique materials in a variety of formats, including analog prints, photographs, audiovisual recordings, three-dimensional objects, and digital materials – both digitized and born-digital. This Working Group is not addressing published materials, such as books, serials, electronic resources, or commercially produced audio and video recordings.

Description in this context means:

- Finding aids / EAD descriptions for archives
- Descriptive notes in MARC records for archives and special format materials

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[1] As of July 2020, the working group comprises two Asian Americans, one Latina, one mixed race Asian American/white woman and seven white women.

[2] Results of a 2012 ALA study showed that, among credentialed librarians, 88% were white, 83% women, and 73% white women. Among library assistants, 73% were white, 81% women, and 61% white women. (American Library Association, Diversity Counts, 2012.) Individual respondents to a 2012 SAA survey self-reported as 89% white and 75% female. (Society of American Archivists, Membership Needs and Satisfaction Survey, Spring 2012.). In 2015, RBMS reported the section's demographics as 87% white, 5% Latino, 3% African-American, 1% Native American, and 0% Pacific Islander. (2015 RBMS Membership Survey: Data Report). These are the latest years for which statistics are currently available.

- Dublin Core (DC) and METS records for digitized and born-digital materials
- SNAC records created or edited by GRI staff

Controlled vocabularies such as name authority files (like LCNAF and ULAN) and subject authority files (like LCSH) will be addressed in coordination with other GRI Library groups.

Additional anti-racist initiatives are developing across the Library and GRI that will address other aspects of institutional activity and practice. We will coordinate with these groups when necessary, useful, or practical.

Objectives & Goals

With a focus on legacy descriptions and current policies and procedures in Special Collections Cataloging and Institutional Archives, the Working Group will make recommendations to address and rectify racist and biased language, distortion, and the erasure of BIPOC lives, and the lives of other marginalized groups and identities, in existing descriptions, and to promote anti-racist descriptive practices moving forward. We are committed to continually educating ourselves; critically examining our descriptive practices; and using appropriate, inclusive, and respectful language to describe the people of color in our collections.

The Working Group will break out into subgroups to focus more effectively on specific areas:

- A review of anti-racist literature as it relates to the description and cataloging of archives and special format materials
- A survey of anti-racist practices at other libraries and archival repositories
- An analysis of our local descriptive guidelines and procedures to identify areas for improvement
- An audit of existing descriptions in our finding aids and catalog records to identify racist/biased language, distortion, and the erasure of BIPOC lives and the lives of other marginalized groups and identities

The review of anti-racist literature and the survey of practices at external institutions will occur concurrently, and will inform our analysis of local descriptive practices and our audit of existing descriptions. The Working Group will then synthesize deliverables from all four subgroups in recommendations for policy and procedural changes.

Deliverables & Timeframes

- Annotated bibliography of anti-racist literature related to the description and cataloging of archives and special formats
  - Timeframe: Complete as of September 2020; additional resources may be added.
- Annotated list of other libraries and archival repositories implementing anti-racist descriptive practices, with links if possible
  - Timeframe: Complete as of September 2020.

- Annotated list of finding aids and catalog records that require revision
  - In Progress as of October 2020
- Annotated list of SCC and IA policies and procedures that warrant revision, with links
  - Timeframe: TBD based on results of subgroup research
- Recommendations for changes in policies and procedures for description of archives and special formats
  - Timeframe: TBD based on results of legacy finding aid review

Roles & Responsibilities

The Working Group Chair serves as meeting convener and facilitator, coordinates the subgroups, and reviews deliverables.

Each Working Group member will participate in at least one subgroup. Each subgroup will designate a Lead Representative who will be responsible for convening and facilitating meetings, coordinating activities and communication within the subgroup, reporting to the larger working group, and organizing deliverables.

Communication

Working Group meetings will be scheduled monthly via Zoom. Subgroups may meet more often.

- Meeting ground rules are based on AORTA's [Anti-Oppressive Facilitation for Democratic Process](#)
- Agendas will be sent in advance of meetings
- Meetings will end with a clear understanding of next steps
- Each meeting will have a designated note taker on a rotational basis
- Meeting notes will be accessible to all Working Group members and read-only access may be granted to other Getty staff via Google Drive
- Charter and findings may be shared internally and externally.

Project documentation and deliverables will be created in a shared GSuite folder: [SCC/IA Anti-Racist Description Working Group](#)

Foundational Documents

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2019). [Anti-Racist Description Resources](#). Retrieved from https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf

Georgetown University (2020). [Anti-Racism Toolkit](#). Retrieved from https://guides.library.georgetown.edu/antiracism/glossary

Harvard University (2020). [Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description](#). Retrieved from

https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/hmschommanual/Guidelines+for+Inclusive+and+Conscientious+Description

Society of California Archivists (2020). SCA Statement in Solidarity with Black Lives Matter. Retrieved from https://calarchivists.org/9033338 This excerpt from the SCA Statement provides a succinct summary of the professional context for the Working Group:

> The Society of California Archivists acknowledges that our profession has supported and continues to support racist systems and practices that uphold systemic inequality and perpetuate white supremacy. The legacy and role of white supremacy in archives has led to a predominately white and male historical record, while Black communities and Black voices are silenced, distorted, or entirely excluded from the historical record. Anti-Blackness has infiltrated our collections, policies, and workforce. It is our responsibility as archivists to dismantle oppressive archival practices and work toward building a more accurate and representative historical record. This moment reminds us as archivists that our work is not only to preserve but to amplify those voices that have been, and continue to be, unheard and silenced. It is this work that we must prioritize at the present moment. Otherwise, we can be sure that the history that is told will be by those voices most carefully crafted to establish and maintain systems of dominance and control.

Revision History

08/24/2020 - Draft finalized
03/23/2021 - Dates provided for completed deliverables as of 03/23/21