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Submitted by

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Prospectus

Remedy, Rectify and Reconstruct: Case studies in inclusive and reparative archival description efforts

- **Theme, purpose and scope**

Theme

In 1977, Howard Zinn called out the inherently political nature of the work of archivists by noting that “knowledge has a social origin and a social use. It comes out of a divided, embattled world, and is pouring into such a world. It is not neutral either in origin or effect. It reflects the bias of a particular social order; more accurately it reflects the diverse biases of a diverse social order, but with one important qualification: that those with the most power and wealth in society will dominate the field of knowledge, so that it serves their interests.” (Zinn, 1977, 17-18). More recent scholarship has refocused our attention to this problem with calls to overhaul our practices in order to address systemic racist traditions.

Reparative work is especially important in the construction of representations of archival materials. As Yakel notes, archival representation “captures the actual work of the archivists in (re)ordering, interpreting, creating surrogates, and designing architectures for representational systems that contain those surrogates to stand in for or represent actual archival materials.” (Yakel, 2003, 2) Given that archives constitute the tangible evidence for memory work, the facility to reckon with the past and reveal the inequities that have been sewn into the fabric of our social and cultural context will provide us with a roadmap for more honest and deliberate representations.

The Anti-Racist Description Working Group of Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia answered the call to address long-standing description practices through their publication “Anti-Racist Description Resources” in 2019 (https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf). This effort has helped us bring to the forefront questions about representation and centering in our descriptive

language. It provides an excellent set of guidelines that includes valuable questions archivists should be engaging with while doing the work of representation as defined by Yakel. The purpose of the work proposed here is to take the next step in engaging with archival repositories that have taken on this important work of respectful and inclusive description. Through case studies of projects and programs, it will provide archival repositories interested in taking on this challenge with the benefit of others' perspectives and experiences.

Need of the work/purpose

The case for reparative description work has been made. Through numerous scholarly articles, conference presentations and online platforms, archivists and public intellectuals have brought attention to the necessity of re-examining the use of language in archival description (e.g., Larade and Pelletier, 1993; Dunbar, 2006; Caswell, 2014; Jules, 2016; Caswell, et al., 2016; Drake, 2016; Adler, 2016; Winn, 2017; Hughes-Watkins, 2018; Drake 2019). These scholars have raised our awareness of the violence of normative language and centered description. However, so far this scholarship falls short of providing concrete suggestions on how to approach the work in context.

The proposed work will provide a comprehensive overview of the scholarship that identifies the role that traditional archival description has played in perpetuating systemic social and racial oppression and will follow with case studies of reparative projects in repositories. The compilation of case studies fills a gap in the literature with specific examples of reparative actions done to existing description and principles for guiding future descriptive work at their repository. With the introductory essay and case studies together, this book will provide repositories interested in embarking on projects of reparative description with a guide that includes multiple examples to learn from and a starting point for their own decision-making.

Scope

The scope of this case study compilation is wide-ranging. The case studies represent a diversity of efforts that share common goals but have different contexts and address different marginalized, underrepresented or silenced groups represented through descriptive efforts. The case studies come from institutional initiatives around the United States and, while the majority of cases are located at academic institutions, two cases represent work done in other cultural heritage environments. The introductory essay will focus on the context of archival description, in light of white supremacy, symbolic annihilation, and underrepresentation. While the chapters detailed below suggest an order, the editors will make a final decision about chapter order once drafts of chapters have been submitted.

Chapter author recruitment

The focus of this work is on existing reparative description projects. This focus impacted our author recruitment strategy. Rather than issue a call for participation, we worked to identify existing projects and reached out to individuals associated with those projects to gauge interest in making a contribution. In several cases, the individuals we reached out to asked to include multiple participants in the chapter's development. That is reflected in the number of chapters that have multiple authors listed.

We recognize that many, although not all, of these projects are based at large, seemingly well-resourced repositories and that will be addressed in the introduction to the volume written by the two editors. One

goal of this publication is to help those repositories that are interested in engaging in this work but less able to support or sustain exploratory initiatives to benefit from work already underway. The editors will also be in dialogue with the authors to ensure that the articles address specific aspects of this work, including engaging with appropriate communities, managing administrative push-back, and providing concrete examples of decision making strategies.

In addition, while the authors below have already agreed to contribute to the project, the editors will continue to look for projects underway that could bring additional voices to the compilation without creating obstacles for achieving the proposed timeline.

- **Estimated format and length**

The publication will be in book format with a length of approximately 300-350 pages. The proposed work will include a preface/introduction, an essay that provides a comprehensive overview of current scholarly work supporting the necessity of reparative description (~40 pages), 13 case studies (~20-25 pages each), and an index.

- **Print or online format**

This work should be in print format. If all authors are in agreement then online access would be considered.

- **Annotated outline or table of contents**

Multi-authored/Edited publication, some chapter titles have not been determined at this point, *all authors below have agreed to contribute.*

- Preface/Introduction: Katherine M. Wisser and Elena C. Hinkle
- Chapter 1: Katherine M. Wisser, “The arguments for reparative description work: why this work matters,” School of Library and Information Science, Simmons University

Chapter description

Archival description is created and disseminated in context. Over the past few decades, systemic racist and supremacist qualities in American culture have been exposed, and different parts of our society have begun to respond. This is true in the archival description community, where scholars such as Jarrett Drake, Lae’l Hughes-Watkins and Michelle Caswell have been calling for reparative efforts and for a sea-change in practices going forward. Much of the practical work has centered on the language used in descriptive practices of the past and on collecting and appraisal practices going forward. This chapter will consist of a comprehensive review of the literature that seeks to synthesize that scholarship in order to ground the authentic case studies that follow.

- Chapter 2: Kate Dietrick and Lara Friedman-Shedlov, “Archives and Special Collections Reparative Description Project,” University of Minnesota

Chapter Description:

The University of Minnesota Libraries began formally outlining principles and values around diversity, equity, and inclusion in description and metadata in 2019 by writing a statement that articulates guiding concepts for organizational accountability and empower individual staff to take action. Within the Archives and Special Collections Department specifically, staff followed up with several initial steps to address harmful and outdated language in finding aids. The staff’s first instinct was to outline a comprehensive, centralized, and systematic project to undertake reparative work across all archival finding aids, but quickly realized a project of that scale faced significant financial and bureaucratic challenges. Instead, they are taking an incremental approach, developing guidelines for simple steps that any archivist editing finding aids can take. This strategy allows the team to incorporate a DEI lens into everyday work, recognizing that the work will be iterative and ongoing. Building on these experiences, the authors hope to normalize and demystify reparative work, empowering others to integrate it into their regular workflows.

- Chapter 3: Annalise Berdini, Kelly Bolding, Faith Charleton, Valencia Johnson, Phoebe Nobles, Armando Suárez, and Amy C. Vo. “Inclusive Description Working Group,” Princeton University

Chapter Description:

This chapter will describe the efforts of the Inclusive Description Working Group at Princeton University Library since its foundation in May of 2019. The group’s initiatives include drafting a public statement on harmful description for their website and establishing a set of internal guidelines for inclusive description; conducting a repository-wide description audit and prioritizing focused redescription projects; implementing workflows for integrating user feedback into description; providing Spanish-language finding aids for Spanish-language collections; and including content warnings in finding aids for traumatizing materials. In addition to providing an overview of this work, the authors will provide some concrete examples of description they have revised and describe how the group’s efforts are aimed toward integrating a reparative framework into all aspects of their archival processing program.

- Chapter 4: Whitney Buccicone and Katie Rojas, “Moving forward together: Implementing reparative work at the University of Virginia’s Special Collections,” University of Virginia
Additional Contributors: Gayle Cooper, Kim Cull, Sharon Defibaugh, Barbara Hatcher, Stacey Lavender, Rose Oliveira, Ellen Welch, Lauren Longwell, Elizabeth Nosari

Chapter Description:

The Technical Services department at the University of Virginia Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections created the Inclusive and Reparative Action Plan (IRAP) in 2020 to take concrete steps towards making the descriptions of their archival and printed materials more

inclusive and more accurately representative. IRAP's main objectives are to describe people in the manner *they* want to be described, improve access to collections by crafting accurate descriptions, empower Special Collections staff to continually learn and examine their own biases in their work, and take responsibility for their work by providing appropriate context for hurtful materials within our collections. The authors will explore how they, as a technical services unit, came together to create this plan and implement it as a team, and will detail each action item that has been implemented thus far. They will also discuss how they, as a majority white and cisgender group of women, have worked on how privilege impacts their day-to-day duties.

- Chapter 5: Stephanie Luke, Kathryn Slover, Sara Pezzoni and Whitney Russell, "University of Texas at Arlington's DEI Committee for Metadata and Digital Projects," University of Texas at Arlington Libraries

Chapter Description:

In this chapter, librarians and archivists from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) Libraries discuss the implementation of processes for repairing archival descriptions of special materials across institutional platforms, including the library catalog, finding aids, and digital collections. This work came out of the organization of UTA Libraries' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee, and the subsequent formation of a sub-committee for Metadata and Digitization. This case study reviews the first year of work from this committee, beginning with the planning, evaluation, and implementation of corrective description work. The authors examine their methods of establishing goals and outcomes, as well as their approach to instituting procedures and workflows for reparative work. They discuss the creation of the project's priorities and scope. They delineate their method of realizing a visible process of corrective work by tracking changes and including revision notes in existing descriptions. They describe the creation of a framework and mechanisms for continued updates to descriptions and conclude with suggestions on how to begin reparative descriptive efforts at other institutions.

- Chapter 6: Rachel Menyuk, "Implementing the NMAI Culture Thesaurus in an Archival Context," National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution

Chapter Description:

The National Museum of the American Indian Culture Thesaurus (NMAICT) is a multilevel reference resource of the Native cultures of the western hemisphere which privileges self-designated affiliations currently represented in NMAI's collection. The NMAICT was constructed after the implementation of NMAI's Collections Information System (EMu) in 2006. NMAI implemented the thesaurus as a tool to replace outdated, derogatory, and inaccurate cultural terminology that impedes access to their collections and contradicts NMAI's mandate of responsible and ethical stewardship. This chapter will look at the process of how the NMAI Archives Center began implementing the NMAICT in Archivist Toolkit (predecessor to ArchivesSpace) in 2014 to replace Library of Congress Subject Headings.

The chapter will conclude with details on the full ingest of the NMAICT into ArchivesSpace, a system shared by archives and special collections across the Smithsonian. This step allowed other units at the Smithsonian, such as the National Anthropological Archives (National Museum of Natural History), to begin implementing NMAICT in their own collections.

- Chapter 7: Meaghan Alson, Laura Hart, Dawne Howard Lucas, Aaron Smithers, and Matthew Turi, “Conscious Editing Steering Committee,” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chapter Description:

This chapter will highlight conversations and reparative work that began at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Wilson Special Collections Library in 2017, with a particular focus on language used in finding aids for more than 500 collections of antebellum papers documenting the American South. A main discussion point is how archivists can mitigate the harm of these collections’ colonialist and white supremacist origins and content by rewriting and refining archival description. The chapter will include before and after examples of language changes the Library has already implemented, as well as discussions about potential additional changes that could happen in the future.

- Chapter 8: Jessica Tai, “Reparative Archival Description Working Group,” Yale University Library

Chapter Description:

The Reparative Archival Description Working Group at Yale Library, also known as RAD, was formed in November 2019 and is charged with creating draft recommendations for reparative archival description work. RAD defines reparative archival description as work that aims to remediate or contextualize potentially outdated or harmful language used in archival description and to create archival description that is accurate, inclusive, and community-centered. RAD’s pilot project, completed between 2020-2021, focused on Japanese American incarceration during World War II, when the United States government incarcerated approximately 120,000 people of Japanese descent, the majority of whom were United States citizens, in American concentration camps. This is often euphemistically referred to as “internment” or “evacuation and relocation.” Currently, RAD is promoting their documentation and project outcomes from the pilot project, fostering an institutional commitment to reparative description through facilitated discussions and programming, and providing support for implementation of their recommendations across the library.

- Chapter 9: Shannon O’Neill and Rachel Searcy, “Right (and Writing) Wrongs: Reparative Description for Japanese American Wartime Incarceration,” New York University

Chapter Description:

The Midori Shimanouchi Lederer Papers at New York University is a collection of personal papers that documents the life of a community organizer and the experience of a family’s forced removal and incarceration at the Central Relocation Camp in Topaz, Utah, during

World War II. A recent accretion to this collection prompted the archivists to revisit its legacy description and surface harmful and inaccurate euphemistic terminology that deliberately downplays the realities of state-sanctioned violence. The need to rectify the description in this collection, and to better reflect the realities of these experiences, pointed to a larger collaborative research and reparative process to address this inaccurate and harmful language across our archival holdings. This chapter documents individual decisions the archivists and curators took, shares concrete examples from the archival description, describes outreach to impacted communities, and demonstrates how archivists can exercise professional judgment to take responsibility for their archival data. They will demonstrate a practical application of various theoretical frameworks that guided this reparative project, particularly radical empathy, cultural humility, and a feminist ethics of care. This chapter will also emphasize the value of intentional collaboration between archivists with different roles, as well as between library professionals and external stakeholders.

- Chapter 10: Annalisa Moretti. “Describing Disability in Houghton Library’s Theater Collection,” Harvard University

Chapter Description:

This chapter will describe the creation of best practice guidelines for the description of people with disabilities in archival materials at Houghton Library, Harvard University, an initiative that was part of a “Year of Professional Engagement” project completed in the 2020-2021 year. The author will describe the background of the project, their research journey to learn more about disability studies and other archivists’ efforts to incorporate it into archival description, the creation of the guidelines (including tips for doing research into subjects, terminology, and creating contextual notes), and future implementation of the guidelines into description practices. The guidelines developed are intended for general use, but materials relating to disabled performers that appear in Houghton’s Theater Collection form the bulk of the examples and the process should provide a model for projects that address specific marginalized or underrepresented communities that are prevalent in certain collecting domains.

- Chapter 11: Lexy deGraffenreid, “Integrating Inclusive Description Practices Programmatically into Penn State’s Processing Workflows,” Pennsylvania State University

Chapter Description:

The Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Pennsylvania State University has embarked on a journey to integrate more inclusive arrangement and descriptive practices programmatically into processing workflows. This work includes updating processing workflows, creating inclusive description resources, and using inclusive and reparative description needs as a prioritization factor within its extensible processing workflows. These efforts are a response to recent archival scholarship, which includes two threads surrounding archival arrangement and description: 1) the need to minimally and efficiently process materials for optimal use, and 2) the need to implement reparative practices in order to more inclusive and ethically document marginalized communities represented in archival

collections. These intellectual through lines are important and necessary components of the ethical stewardship of collections. This chapter discusses the integration of more inclusive processing practices into standard workflows, ensuring that more inclusive practices become part of “The Work” of archivists rather than reinforcing the marginalization of historically underrepresented communities through means such as temporary labor or as a special project.

- Chapter 12: Megan Mummey, “Sustaining Cross-Departmental Programmatic Change for Reparative Description at University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center,” University of Kentucky

Chapter Description:

The chapter will present a case study on the implementation of reparative description at the University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections Research Center (SCRC). This work is especially important at the University of Kentucky because of the Commonwealth of Kentucky’s long history of exploitation and marginalization. Following the protest movements sparked by George Floyd’s death in the summer of 2020, the SCRC began its reparative description efforts with the development of a Harmful Language Statement. Since then the SCRC has taken a cross-departmental, programmatic approach to implementing reparative description practices. The Inclusive Description Working Group, including representatives from across the campus. The case study will discuss the origins and context of the group, implementation, successes, challenges, and future opportunities and will include a brief assessment of the literature consulted by the Inclusive Description Working Group as well as suggestions for how professional organizations can further support this reparative description work.

- Index (completed by the editors)

- **Intended audience and the potential market**

The intended audience is for new and practicing archivists engaged in description and reference work, those interested in improving the representation of marginalized, underrepresented or silenced voices in archival collections, and other archivists working in specific domains or within specific collecting initiatives.

- **Prospective value to the archival profession**

The value of this work rests in the case study approach which will provide archivists with concrete examples of reparative strategies that they can readily incorporate into their own efforts. Each case study will provide sufficient context to the project so that the variables that have constituted their strategy are revealed. This approach will allow for adoption and adaptation of various projects for local implementation.

- **Relationship of the proposed publication to the literature in the field**

The introductory essay (chapter 1) will be a comprehensive review of the scholarship in the field.

- **Possibility of co-sponsorship with another organization**

Unaware of any

- **Possibility of outside financial support**

Unaware of any

- **Graphics and illustrations the publication might use**

Potential use of illustrations from case study authors to depict before-and-after description.

- **Co-authors or contributors in the case of an edited work**

- **Introduction/Preface**

- Katherine M. Wisser and Elena Carroll Hinkle

- **Introductory Essay**

- Katherine M. Wisser

- **Case studies**

- Please see table of contents above for author, title and institutional affiliation information.

- **Anticipated schedule for preparation of the publication**

September 2021: Case studies identified and contributors solicited for commitment to contribute

January 2022: Revised Proposal submitted for consideration

February - June 2022: Case studies written
First draft submitted to the editor by June 15th

November 2022: Completed Manuscript ready for copy-editing

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