

# Challenges to Creating and Promoting a Diverse Record: Manuscripts and University Archives at Florida State University Libraries

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The Special Collections & Archives Division at Florida State University Libraries (FSU) is home to many diverse collections, including Sumerian and Mesopotamian clay tablets dating back to 4,000 BCE, 18<sup>th</sup> century logbooks for the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, political correspondence on the Wage and Hour Bill of 1936, and collections documenting FSU's precursor institutions, the Seminary West of the Suwannee River and the Florida State College for Women. In recent years the division has grown exponentially in its online presence, with 34 collections currently residing in DigiNole: FSU's Digital Repository. Due to this increase in demand for digitized materials, including collections with complicated legacy descriptions, the digital work we engage in is driven by the need to question how we interact with and provide access to materials. As an institution of learning with its home in the American South, stewardship of our diverse records presents a unique set of challenges for our university:

- What material do we select for digitization and how do we describe it so it is discoverable?
- How do we handle outdated modes of collection description that reflect defunct views on race?
- How can we utilize collections that contain materials espousing controversial views on race in an educational and informative manner?
- How can we collect and present an institutional history for future generations that balances the predominantly white past<sup>1</sup> of the university and the growth of FSU into an

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<sup>1</sup>Seminary West of the Suwannee (1851-1901), Florida State College (1901-1905), and Florida Female College/Florida State College for Women (1905-1947) for white women, though some Latina women did attend. Florida State University (1947 - present). FSU's first black student, Maxwell Courtney, was admitted in the fall of 1962.

institution that was recently presented its second “Diversity Champion” award in the summer of 2017?

This article represents our continued exploration in answering the broader question: How do we improve upon current methods and develop new solutions to positively promote and engage our patrons with diverse historical material?

### **Selection and Description in Digital Projects and the Archivist’s Responsibility**

The materials we choose to digitize and the ways we describe digitized materials can create false pictures of our collections. This can occur through exclusion, both conscious and unconscious, misrepresentation by description, or a lack of description that prohibits discovery. Once materials are digitized, the manner of organization and description can either help users discover diverse materials or, perplexingly, hide them from users if the archivists are either unaware of their own biases or not thinking through the implications of their organizational and descriptive decisions.

Because context is often lost when we digitize and put materials online, the materials we select and describe for digital collections is a key component to telling a complete story. To showcase campus diversity over time, it is important to examine which collections need to be made available. Prioritizing digitization of such materials is necessary to give a diverse and authentic historical picture of Florida State University. At this point, the archivist needs to stop thinking on a collection level, which can be difficult to do, and instead think on an item level. Specifically, what items need to be digitized from individual collections that will help tell a more complete narrative of the University?

Moreover, when working with digital collections, selection is critical because there is not one “main door,” or single point of entry, to a digital library as there is to a reading room or museum. If a user does come in the “main door,” which, in our case is the digital library home page, they link to the site directly and browse through the curated collections. At FSU, we try to organize collections as usefully as possible, but the digital content is not always reflective of the physical organization of the collections on our shelves; therefore, the physical context of items within the collection may be lost. Topical digital collections, such as the Civil War Era and Florida History & Heritage digital collections, lose physical collection context because they combine materials from numerous book and manuscript collections. These collection titles allow our users to easily discover materials from the Civil War. To prevent the loss of physical context, and meet archival standards, we need to maintain the original context of each item in a mixed collection. To do so in DigiNole: FSU’s Digital Repository, we use an item’s metadata. Original collection information and a link to the appropriate finding aid is noted with each item, so users know where the item came from in our physical collections.

Users who do not access our digital collections via the “main door” may discover materials through Google, other search engines, or our library catalog and go directly to an item, neatly bypassing any sort of organizational decisions we made to help give the item context at the collection level. Most, if not all, of these discovery pathways are out of the archivist’s control once the object is online. The challenge then becomes, how do archivists select and catalog items that can tell the diverse story of FSU outside of any sort of curated context? Again, metadata comes to the rescue when both physical and intellectual context are lost. However, we now have a new challenge: How do we help maintain intellectual context using metadata?

At FSU Libraries, we use subject headings to orientate users to the main intellectual context of items. These headings can also lead a user to other items that fit their interests in DigiNole, whether part of the same collection or not. There is one caveat—those connections are only as good as the description provided with an item. So, if not enough information, or the

wrong kind of information, is provided, the item can remain hidden in plain sight to users. Search engines are not magical; they need to be given the right information in order to return a user the right search results. During digitization, it is the archivist's responsibility to ensure item description is strong enough to be discoverable in search engines. To do so effectively, we must be aware of our own biases when describing materials for the digital environment. What are we accidentally hiding in our digital collections because we used ambiguous language or failed to provide accurate descriptions? For example, if you search in DigiNole for "African American" within our Heritage & University Archives photograph collection, only one result will be returned. If you search for "blacks," more than one photograph will be found, but not the one returned with the first search. Making decisions about a common, diverse vocabulary and creating documentation to ensure it is used consistently in a system will guarantee that archivists are not unintentionally hiding digital objects due to poor, misinformed, or inconsistent metadata.

Once an item is correctly described, there is one last question we must grapple with: what is our responsibility to the user in terms of our description? Providing context for an item is one thing; editorializing, or even being too politically correct or incorrect, can be damaging to discoverability. In DigiNole, we hold the Bradford-Eppes Family Papers. The collection includes the manuscript "The Real Reason for the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," by Susan Bradford Eppes.<sup>2</sup> Though the document is authentic, it is not factually correct. While working on metadata for this collection, FSU faculty discussed how to deal with this object and others like it in DigiNole. Did we want to include a disclaimer in the object's metadata? Alert the user to its biased point of view? In the end, we decided not to address these issues in the metadata. We agreed that it was not our role as archivists to decide for the user what is and is not useful. This decision puts the onus on the user to be resource savvy, just as we would expect them to be in our reading room. The controversial manuscript led us to create FSU's digital collections policy, which neither restricts digital access to nor labels digitized materials with content that has become questionable over time.

### **Race and Legacy Descriptions in Manuscript Collections**

In late 2015, Special Collections & Archives staff began a review of finding aid language that did not conform to modern usage. Many scope and content notes and biographical sketches had not changed since first composed for print finding aids in the 1960s. Like other long-established repositories, our descriptive language was a product of its time and outdated for modern users. Typically, print finding aids are written with a specific context in mind—that the researcher will be in a particular location, with access to a particular repository's staff, and thus able to identify local cultural cues that inform descriptive terms. Having migrated many of our finding aids to an online database, we felt it was time to re-evaluate some of our descriptive practices. This would allow us to move away from the geocentric and ethnocentric biases that are inherent in our local knowledge systems and cater to a nonlocal research public.

Archivists at the FSU Libraries sought to follow the example of other repositories in keeping descriptive terms up-to-date and accessible to researchers.<sup>3</sup> It is fine for our holdings to be seen as historical but not for the repository, its descriptions, and its staff to be perceived as behind the times. For example, in our print finding aids, the terms "black," "African-American," "Negro," and "colored" had each been used equally to refer to the same demographic group. While all four were once in polite, popular usage in the United States, the last two are now considered dated and could be deemed offensive by archives users.

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<sup>2</sup>Susan Bradford Eppes, "The Real Reason for the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln Literary," 1927, 1938, MSS 86-17, Box 682, Folder 6, Susan Bradford Eppes fonds. Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>3</sup>Jeffrey Beall, "Ethnic Groups and Library of Congress Subject Headings," *Colorado Libraries* 32, no.4 (2006): 37-44.

The terms “colored” and “Negro” occurred in titles of works in our collections<sup>4</sup> and in proper names of entities, notably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Therefore, direct quotes from those works appear in our collection and item descriptions. In discussing these works, the concern was that changing supplied titles or direct quotes would hamper discoverability of these resources and perhaps misrepresent their content and the intent of their creators. As Gregory Hunter notes, a good finding aid is clearly worded and “objective about the collection.”<sup>5</sup> Modifying titles and proper names would hinder the finding aid on both counts. It was decided that these works would stand as written in order to preserve their historical integrity.

Other instances of outdated terminology occurred in descriptive text devised by Special Collections & Archives staff, such as scope notes and biographical sketches. Some of these required only simple substitutions, such as using the term “black” or “African-American” in place of an offensive term. Some instances required more consideration before editing descriptive text. For example, the scope note for an 1814 manuscript description of runaway slaves describes the eight slaves as “negroes belonging to the Estate of Colonel Lewis.”<sup>6</sup> A simple substitution of “blacks” for “negroes” would be accurate, but perhaps not correct; simply noting the race of these individuals does not properly or concisely describe their relationship to Colonel Lewis or the document being described. In the case of our 1814 escapees, it was decided that the most accurate substitute for “negroes” was “slaves.”

Similarly, a biographical note for one collection of family papers noted that a family member had been “murdered by a Negro.” The race of his murderer was judged to be nonessential context to the biography and could potentially be seen as inflammatory. As such, the current version of the biography notes only that he was “murdered near Pine Hill Plantation on September 3, 1904.”<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally, an ethnocentric bias can create a lack of appropriate description. Take for example the personal papers of noted mathematician and quantum physicist Paul A.M. Dirac. Among the artifacts in the collection is a souvenir paper fan from a 1929 dinner at a restaurant in Japan.<sup>8</sup> This particular fan was illustrated and autographed by Dirac’s dinner companions Werner Heisenberg, Yoshio Nishina, and Sugiura Yoshikatsu, each also a notable name in the history of physics. However, until late 2017, descriptive text at the series- and item-level in the Dirac Papers finding aid noted only the autographs of Dirac and Heisenberg. The finding aid has since been edited to include references to their Japanese colleagues.

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<sup>4</sup>Carla Rider Hayden, “Our Colored Lady of Shallot,” n.d., MSS 01-06, Box 149, Folder 2, Carla Rider Haden fonds, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>5</sup>Gregory S. Hunter, “Description,” in *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2003), 152-153.

<sup>6</sup>Description of Runaway Slaves fonds, MSS 0-288. Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>7</sup>Pine Hill Plantation Papers fonds, MSS 0-204, Series 2, Item 352. Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>8</sup>Autographed Japanese paper fan belonging to Paul A.M. Dirac, 1971, MS-1989-009, Box 100, Folder 1, Paul A.M. Dirac fonds, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.



*Japanese Souvenir Fan, 1929, Series 3, Box 100, Paul A. M. Dirac Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida. [http://purl.fcla.edu/fsu/MSS\\_1989-009](http://purl.fcla.edu/fsu/MSS_1989-009)*

In light of these discoveries and necessary edits in our finding aids, Special Collections & Archives staff have considered how to guide future descriptive practice in an effort to remain clear and objective regarding race and other demographic terminology. A few guidelines will be carried forward:

- Descriptive text should reflect current societal and academic nomenclature. This guideline is part of keeping finding aids clear, objective, and consistent with researcher needs. It is widely accepted in our field that archival description can be iterative, and this is certainly a case where revisiting and improving description is beneficial.
- Descriptive text should be suitable to and consistent with the purpose of any note or field in a finding aid. Details of an individual's appearance or demographic identity may not always be necessary or appropriate.

- Direct quotes from archival materials and supplied titles should always retain the original text when it best represents collection content and creator intent.

These rules of thumb would certainly be applicable to other subject areas and to other repositories outside Florida State University. Admittedly, FSU's instance of the Archon database was exceptionally useful in finding cases of outdated description; a repository that only had description in print would certainly face a larger investment of time. However, any investment that renders archival material useful to a wider audience will certainly pay dividends down the road for any repository.

### **Controversial Material in Political Papers Collections**

The Claude Pepper Library was opened in 1985 as the home of the Pepper Papers, a collection documenting the 45-year career of U.S. Senator and Representative Claude Denson Pepper. Since its opening, the library has become the political papers repository for the FSU Special Collections & Archives Division. It currently maintains 22 collections, including those of the National Organization for Women (NOW) Tallahassee Chapter, former governors LeRoy Collins and Reubin Askew, and the *Haynes et al. vs. Shoney's Inc.* racial discrimination case files. The contents of these record groups are as diverse as the history they document. Researchers are able to view primary source material ranging from correspondence surrounding Social Security and the Equal Rights Amendment to a pair of rooster spurs that are believed to have been a good luck charm of Governor Spessard L. Holland.

One potential challenge facing the Claude Pepper Library concerns the makeup of some of the older collections currently available for research. Notably, portions of these collections clearly document sentiments of support for institutionalized racism and other views that have since been deemed detrimental to positive social growth. A review of the holdings revealed a predominantly white, male representation of political history in the State of Florida, with the inclusive dates for the majority of the collections at the Pepper Library falling between 1930 and 1960. The 1930s saw a steady increase in race-related crimes that precipitated the proposal of yet another anti-lynching act by the U.S. Senate in 1938. Although the United States would become a global power during World War II, racial injustice and segregation were still firmly in place in the United States even as the war was fought to end bigotry and oppression in Europe and Asia. The Civil Rights movement arose in the 1950s and 60s, fueled by the events of the previous decade and such brutal actions as the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955. Senator Pepper and Florida Supreme Court Justice William Glenn Terrell were in positions of national and statewide prominence as the Second World War and the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement were taking place.

While a freshman Senator, Pepper joined many of his southern colleagues in a filibuster of the Anti-Lynching Bill of 1938. Speaking for approximately seven hours, over two days on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Pepper was quoted in the Congressional Record as saying "...God knows how many million American citizens, are walking the streets unemployed, in spite of our tremendous relief rolls, and when America is sitting on the crater of a bursting volcano, we come here and dabble with an anti-lynching bill."<sup>9</sup> Pepper's decision to disregard the civil liberties of large portions of his constituency and filibuster the Anti-Lynching Bill was unfortunate, and he would later admit to this in the pages of his autobiography, *Pepper, Eyewitness to a Century*.<sup>10</sup> The event would eventually come to serve as a reminder that the ideologies of politicians can evolve and change over time. Pepper's Senate career ended with the 1950 midterms when he lost a highly contested election to his former protégé, George A. Smathers. After a twelve-year hiatus

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<sup>9</sup>Remarks by Claude Pepper on the Anti-Lynching Bill of 1937, 1937, MSS 1979-01, Series 203, Box 1, Folder 7, Claude Pepper fonds, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>10</sup>Claude Denson Pepper and Hays Gorey, *Pepper, Eyewitness to a Century* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

from public office, Pepper ran for and won the 13<sup>th</sup> congressional district seat in Miami, Florida, beginning his service in early 1963. Later that same term, Representative Pepper would be alone among his colleagues in the state of Florida to vote for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In 1954, *Brown vs. the Board of Education* declared that the segregation of public schools based on race was unconstitutional. This decision was met with much resistance in the south and many elected officials were among those in opposition. In an October 1955 edition of the Miami Herald, Justice Glenn Terrell gave his opinion on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*: "States with segregated schools have them from a deep seeded conviction. They are as loyal to that conviction as any other philosophy to which they are devoted. They are as honest and law abiding as the people of any state where integrated schools are the rule. Convinced of the justice of their position, they will not readily renounce it if they are required to forfeit abruptly their conviction."<sup>11</sup> Terrell's stance, that he would oppose desegregation as long as possible, was backed by a substantial portion of his constituency as well. There are over 100 pieces of correspondence included in the collection that supported continued segregation. One piece of correspondence, from a resident of Tampa, Florida, reads: "We must have this leadership [opposition to desegregation] if our good Negroes and our wonderful generations of white children are to survive. The root of this NAACP must be found and destroyed before they exploit the lives of us all for some selfish gains a few men are trying to get."<sup>12</sup> Those "gains" were equal access to education and resources that would equip young people of color for a better future in an uncertain time.

In light of the aforementioned information, the question on some minds might be, "What should be done with this material?" For archivists, the challenge is to find opportunities to utilize these resources in an educational setting by providing context and meaning. While material of this nature may not reflect positively on the legacy of the person(s) responsible for its creation and promotion, it is essential for repositories to retain this information to meet that challenge. At the Pepper Library, we set aside a portion of our instruction sessions to talk with students about the impact of legacy, in particular the events surrounding the Anti-Lynching Bill of 1938. The layout of the Pepper Museum naturally focuses on the Senator's many and varied achievements in the public arena and the tendency for many students and visitors is to focus on these. While striving to remain respectful to Pepper's legacy, the current instruction program also sheds light on examples of controversial material to give more context to that individual's (Pepper, Terrell, etc.) place in history.

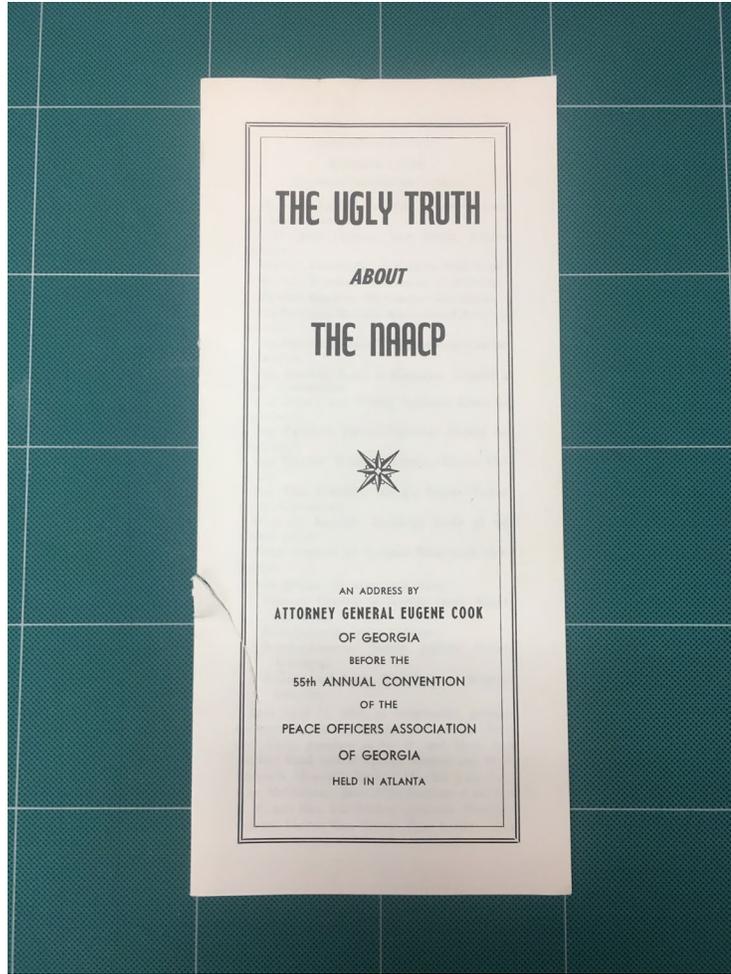
Presently, the Pepper Papers are undergoing a records survey to address preservation needs that have arisen over the 35-plus years in our possession. The Senator's journals (1937-1985) and roughly 6,000 still images (none of which feature depictions of controversial action) are available for viewing in our digital library. In his journal, Pepper does address his involvement with the Anti-Lynching Bill, though he offers no deep insight, nor do his entries reflect his words from the filibuster in the Senate chambers. Given these circumstances, this material is available to researchers with enough provided context to describe the time in which it was created. As of yet, for logistical purposes, no portions of the Terrell Papers have been digitized.

Given these circumstances, we openly prioritize addressing this material with classes and researchers when they visit the Pepper Library and when appropriate to their research. Making students and researchers aware that this information is available and accessible allows them to observe the changes that can occur over time in the ideology of politicians and elected officials.

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<sup>11</sup>Correspondence re. desegregation to Justice Glenn Terrell, 1955, MSS 92-25, Box 15, Folder 1C, Justice Glenn Terrell fonds, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



*Anti NAACP pamphlet from the Justice Glenn Terrell Papers, Box 16 Folder 1 MSS 1992-25*

### **University Archives & the Heritage Museum: How We Collect and Present Institutional History**

Heritage & University Archives maintains FSU's official repository of historic university records and other materials. The archive holds publications, records, photographs, audio-visual and other material in physical or digital form created by or about the University. The archives and Heritage Museum also include student experience materials created by alumni at the time of their enrollment at the University or collected over time. Since 1851, Florida State University has been many institutions in name and makeup, but it has always been one of higher learning, in the South, and of a mostly white population. Although our collections are diverse, they have not caught up with our current student demographics, and will not for some time due to the older age of typical donors, and an overall lack of collecting in the past.

Near the eve of FSU's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2001, it was realized there were few records to consult or use for planning a celebration. Several alumni and staff began working towards a program that would eventually become Heritage Protocol, and later Heritage & University Archives. The program began collecting in earnest in 2007. The majority of our donors are typically aged 60 years or older, or their records have been donated by their heirs or friends. Alumni within these categories attended the university near or before integration, which impacts the racial diversity of our collections. As a collecting initiative focused on alumni

donors, the motivation of Heritage Protocol, whether conscious or unconscious, relied heavily on existing alumni groups and those closely associated with the University, which inadvertently decreased the diversity of the collections. On a positive note, collecting from those older alumni led to a natural focus on the Florida State College for Women (1905-1947). This gives FSU an exceptional collection of women's history and a distinct view into the educational and social lives of women in one of the largest schools of its kind in the southeast during the first half of the 20th century.

In the past, FSU's donation agreements often included language regarding digitization of the received materials. This means the majority of donated material was included in both our physical and online collections. With few donations coming from minority groups or organizations, the online collections mirror the physical collections in terms of the lack of diversity. By focusing on some of our more recent acquisitions, such as our Black Student Union and Pride Student Union collections, we will begin to diversify our online presence in the coming year. Additionally, we continue to consciously seek out materials from underrepresented groups to diversify our collections overall.

*"At a baseline level, diverse audiences may not be comfortable going where they are not reflected – from the exhibits to the museum's professional staff."*<sup>13</sup>



*Florida State University Heritage Museum, Dodd Hall. Open to the public Monday-Thursday, 10am to 4pm.*

The Heritage Museum opened in 2011 as an exhibition space for the archive's collections, with the intent of also serving as an event and development space. The downside was that it was open irregularly and not advertised as a study or public space. The Libraries, specifically Heritage & University Archives, took over management of the museum in mid-2014, with some remaining control held by University administration. Since then, it has been open regularly during the week, with at least one thousand visitors and students studying per semester. There has also been an increase in outreach and events.

<sup>13</sup>Angela Thorpe, "Rethinking Diversity: Introduction," National Council on Public History, 2014. <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/rethinking-diversity-introduction/>.

Students and faculty alike have commented on the lack of diverse representation in the museum. When the Libraries assumed management of the space, approximately 400 images made up the “permanent” exhibit; less than 10 were people of color and none were representative of other than a heteronormative gender identity. Given a review of the exhibit itself and the existing records and news articles of the development of the space, there was likely a conscious bias to use imagery that current and potential donors would identify with most. There also may have been an unconscious bias to disregard the presentation of more diverse materials, not just because donors were seen as the priority group to engage, but also considering the fact that the exhibit mostly reflects its creators’ demographics. After a comprehensive review, we removed approximately 100 images and added 50 images and objects that more accurately represent the campus community over time. Diversity and related initiatives are in vogue at most institutions and for good reason. But how is diversity expressed in our initiative to collect, preserve, and provide access to our collections? Diversity without action will be less impactful and provide less lasting change in our archives and museum. Describing diverse materials must include those we are collecting about; underrepresented communities must have a voice in these processes. With several initiatives growing on FSU’s campus, the potential for interesting collaborations and positive results remains strong.

It is our priority that all students feel a sense of belonging in the museum by being able to identify with the exhibit. Additionally, we continue to expand our hours and outreach activities in the museum in order to be more accessible, which ensures that our museum space is used to better connect with the FSU community.

### **Looking to the Future**

In the summer of 2017, a curators’ working group was formed to better coordinate our efforts across the Special Collections & Archives Division. A key goal of this group is finding a unified approach to address concerns across our varied holdings. Despite the proliferation of unique issues and the lack of common solutions, being able to pool our expertise has proven invaluable in the promotion of our diverse records. Opportunities to engage our campus community—as well as communities far beyond Tallahassee—with our unique and sometimes problematic resources, also continue to increase.

Last year, Heritage & University Archives formed a partnership with FSU’s Black Student Union to preserve and give representative voice to that organization’s history. Collection development and outreach activities continue with respect to the Emmett Till Archives at FSU Libraries, documenting the life, death, and memory of Emmett Louis Till. Curators have been conscientious in including Tallahassee community members as well as faculty, staff, and students from Florida A&M University, our neighboring Historically Black University, in any events related to our civil rights collections. The Pepper Library is currently in the planning stages for initiatives targeted at outreach to the College of Social Work at FSU and the local African American research community in Tallahassee.

At the time of our presentation, we were at the beginning stage of addressing our shared challenge - creating and promoting a diverse archival record. Our selection and description processes, and how we present our collections, continues to evolve. It is reassuring that other archival repositories are also working to find solutions to these same challenges. While archival theory and practice will inevitably continue to change, a key imperative will be to ensure that our collections continue to reflect the diversity of their creators, the users who access them, and Florida State University as a whole.

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