Curating Diverse Voices: Challenges in Diversity of Representation and Description in the Panama Canal Museum Collection at the University of Florida

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The Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) at the University of Florida documents the American era of the Panama Canal, with the majority of the materials dating from 1904 to 1999.[1] To a lesser degree, the collection also preserves historical records relating to the Canal prior and subsequent to U.S. construction and operation. The official records of the Panama Canal Commission, the Canal Zone Government, and other governing agencies are preserved by the National Archives in the U.S., so a major purpose of the PCMC is to document the lives of the people who worked on the Canal and lived in the Canal Zone and in Panama during the American era. While the records in the National Archives document the activities and perspective of the U.S. government, the PCMC provides an opportunity for individuals with diverse voices and experiences to preserve and share their personal stories.

The collection covers a vast and varied range of subject areas, including Canal operations, defense and security, labor, construction and maintenance, international politics, transportation, indigenous people, everyday life, health care, and education. Not only is the PCMC's subject matter diverse, but the formats of the materials include personal papers, photographs, artifacts, audiovisual recordings, maps, and printed materials, such as school yearbooks, newspapers, and government documents. The collection is truly a hybrid library-archives-museum (LAM) collection, and its complexity and size necessitate management by a team of archivists and librarians with subject- and format-specific expertise.[2] Maps are managed by the Head of the Map & Imagery Library; printed books and serials are managed by librarians in the Latin American & Caribbean Collection; and the archival materials and artifacts are managed by the PCMC Curator, who is an archivist, and the PCMC Curatorial Assistant, who is a museum professional. From the researcher's perspective, it can be a daunting task to understand these curatorial divisions and to navigate the descriptive metadata that facilitates discovery and access, because there is no single finding aid or database for the collection.

[1] The Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC), https://pcmc.uflib.ufl.edu, is a part of the Department of Special Collections and Area Studies in the George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida.

[2] LAMs and the convergence of cultural heritage repositories have been discussed widely in professional literature over the past fifteen years. Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel, and Ricky Erway, *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums*, (OCLC Programs and Research, 2008), accessed July 12, 2020, https://library.oclc.org/digital/collection/p267701coll27/id/443/; And Wendy M. Duff, Jennifer Carter, Joan M. Cherry, Heather MacNeil, and Lynne C. Howarth, "From Coexistence to Convergence: Studying Partnerships and Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums," *Information Research* 18, no. 3 (2013), accessed July 12, 2020, http://InformationR.net/ir/18-3/paper585.html.

Instead, this metadata exists in separate library catalog records, digital library records, and archival records in a collection management database.

While the collection has a wide variety of subjects and formats, the voices of some groups of people are not represented adequately. The PCMC is an artificial collection, primarily assembled by a relatively homogenous group of Americans with a shared history and culture. The collection has very few materials that document the perspectives and stories of Panamanian, West Indian,[3] and other workers who were not U.S. citizens. Similarly, the descriptive terminology used in the collection is sometimes not appropriate or respectful to these underrepresented or marginalized groups. For example, the indigenous Guna people are described inconsistently as "San Blas Indians," "Cuna," "Kuna," or simply as "Indians." Collection managers have been working to correct these gaps in collecting areas and to ensure consistent and respectful descriptive practices, but there is still a great deal of work to do. This article will touch on a few of the significant challenges that we face, the processes that we use to address them, and the steps we have made in moving forward.[4] We also intend for this article to be a continuation of the exploration of challenges and themes posed by the excellent article in the inaugural issue of the *Society of Florida Archivists Journal* describing efforts to ensure diversity of representation and description by the Special Collections & Archives Division at Florida State University.[5]

Collection History

The collection was developed initially by the Panama Canal Museum, a private community-organized museum that operated for approximately fourteen years. In 1997, with the approaching turnover of the Panama Canal from the U.S. to the Republic of Panama, several former Panama Canal employees and residents of the Canal Zone–historically called "Zonians"–decided that they needed to create a museum that would preserve and promote the history of the American era of the Panama Canal.

The last three decades of the twentieth century were rough for the Zonians. After the signing of treaties in 1977 between the U.S. and the Republic of Panama, the Canal Zone ceased to exist in 1979, and control of the Canal was transferred to Panama in 1999. In this relatively short period, the Zonians were displaced from the physical location of their community (a small area of U.S. territory that had existed in the middle of Panama) and then had to learn to live with the reality that they were a dying community –– there would be no new Zonians.

With the need to preserve their history and share it with others, museum founders in 1998 developed an organizational structure and governing documents, and by 1999 were acquiring their first donations of objects. The museum operated in leased space in Seminole, Florida, and by 2001 had sufficient space for exhibits, a library, and offices, along with a separate collection storage facility. Museum leaders were successful in raising funds through memberships, auctions, gift store sales, grants, and fundraising events. The museum expanded outreach and educational offerings with publications and a speaker's bureau in order to promote

[3] Tens of thousands of people from the West Indies (primarily Barbados, Jamaica, and the Antilles) came to Panama to work on the construction of the Panama Canal. In the context of the Panama Canal, this group and their descendants are commonly referred to as people of West Indian descent or Caribbean descent.

[4] We decided to use the first-person plural "we" throughout this article. One primary goal of this article is to explain our decision-making process for giving respect and voices to people, and it seems somewhat cold and impersonal to discuss this in the third person. We are humans working to respect other humans, and it feels correct and specific to state that we are making decisions and we are taking actions rather than stating that "the authors" or "the curators" are doing these things.

[5] Robert Rubero, Sandra Varry, Rory Grennan, and Krystal Thomas, "Challenges to Creating and Promoting a Diverse Record: Manuscripts and University Archives at Florida State Libraries," *Society of Florida Archivists Journal* 1, no. 1 (December 2018): 13-23, https://journals.flvc.org/sfaj/issue/view/SFAJ.

the collection and Canal history. The museum developed a collection of more than twelve thousand objects, largely through the efforts of volunteers. In 2007 the museum hired its first professional employee, and she began serving as director, but for many years the museum was mainly operated by volunteers. Throughout its years of operation, the museum enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the Panama Canal Society and displayed traveling exhibits at the society's annual reunion.

Despite these significant successes, museum leaders recognized that they needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of both the collection and their educational and outreach activities. The museum relied on its membership for funds and on its volunteers for collection development and management. However, museum leaders foresaw an inevitable decline in the museum's membership base because there were only so many former Canal employees and Canal Zone residents in the U.S., and that number would drop significantly over time. As early as 2003, a consultant advised that the museum should consider partnering with an established museum or a college or university in order to ensure the future of the collection. After considering multiple options, the museum signed an agreement with the University of Florida in 2012 to establish the Panama Canal Museum Collection at UF.[6]

Diversity of Representation

Although the history of the Panama Canal is an international story that involves a large, diverse group of people, the PCMC is deficient when it comes to documenting this diversity and representing all voices. One significant reason for this lack of diversity in representation is the manner in which the collection was created and managed in its early years. Early Panama Canal Museum collecting activities involved donors who were primarily white Zonians and other white Americans who worked on or around the Canal, and a large majority of the materials collected by the museum represented the experiences and perspectives of this homogenous community. Zonians donated photos and ephemera documenting themselves, their families, their friends, their jobs, and their social networks. For the most part, the museum did not significantly engage donors from other communities, such as Panamanians, people of West Indian descent, and the indigenous peoples of the region. As a result, the museum developed a segregated community collection that succeeded at preserving the past of one specific group of people, but failed to represent lives and experiences outside of that community. The collection did not reflect the diverse communities and complex history of peoples that were involved with and impacted by the U.S. construction of the Canal through Panama (1903-1914) and its subsequent management throughout the twentieth century.

Community and culturally-specific museums serve important functions in our society, and despite the significant gaps in representation, the Panama Canal Museum successfully developed an extensive collection of valuable historical resources. Although UF has expanded the PCMC collecting scope and activities since the merger in 2012, it is important to understand the seeds of the collection's composition and the challenging roots that have been born from that seed. The process has not been dissimilar to the historical evolution of the private collection into a public museum–the community that the collection has been entrusted to reflect is now dramatically expanded, and thus the collection itself must change; it can no longer simply speak to the taste and interests of its original creators. As an institution of higher learning, we cannot be content with maintaining the collection's narrow representation. It does not serve our mission or the research community, nor does it serve history. Consequently, we are working

[6] University of Florida, *The Panama Canal – Preserving a Legacy, Celebrating a Centennial, Leveraging an Extraordinary Human Achievement*, a grant proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, (George A. Smathers Libraries, 2011), accessed November 30, 2020, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00009715.

through the growing pains of extending collecting activities to include other marginalized groups that played different but equally significant roles in the story of the Panama Canal.

One fascinating development that underscores the PCMC's existence as a hybrid collection is that archivists and museum professionals at UF (and even teaching faculty, to a lesser extent) have established somewhat different approaches to interpretation and instruction when interacting with it. PCMC materials are featured in a minimum of two exhibits annually, including an exhibition in the Albert H. Nahmad Panama Canal Gallery at UF. There is also regular demand by faculty for class sessions and tours on topics such as race relations, international politics, and Caribbean history and culture. The breadth and depth of representation in the holdings are important to support archival research, of course, but in some respects this lack of representation matters more significantly on the museum side of the hybrid collection equation, particularly relating to interpretation. Archival repositories are not neutral–after all, they are primarily collections accumulated by dominant groups in society–but they exist and provide access so that interpretations can be derived by others.[7] Museums, on the other hand, craft the interpretation through exhibitions. Many museum professionals and scholars see it as a museum's role to actively engage in challenging the status quo, and to some degree this is the current climate of the museum world at large. To relate it back to the discussion Duncan Cameron began back in 1971 about whether museums should be temples or forums, in today's world museums have long since (for better or worse) left the work of the temple behind and have fully embraced the role of forum for public discussion, debate, and congregation.[8]

Exhibition content has the power to break down cultural divides, shape public and personal opinion, give voice to the long silenced, and to cast light on the darker corners of history that so often go unaddressed because they make us uncomfortable. Certainly, museums like the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the National Museum of the American Indian, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights prove this point with profound and compelling effect, but so too do museums whose foundational purposes strive to inspire dialogue, reflection, and understanding through specific exhibitions. A few of the many examples include the Science Museum of Minnesota's exhibition *Race: Are We So Different?* (2007); the Brooklyn Museum and Château de Malmaison exhibition *Jacques-Louis David Meets Kehinde Wiley* (2019); the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition *Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence* (2020); the educational and art exhibitions at Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary; and the Oakland Museum of California's *Queer California: Untold Stories* (2019).[9] Following this professional tack, our interpretive and educational activities should champion underrepresented voices and highlight injustices, discriminations, etc. But to do this, exhibitions need *things* to help write that engaging narrative and visual *objects* to illustrate it more powerfully. This leaves PCMC curators and exhibit designers in a difficult position. Because the spectrum of diversity in the collection is narrow, it limits our ability to highlight the lives, experiences, stories, and perspectives of groups outside of the Zonians. Although we deeply mine sources for different layers of representation, relationships, and meaning, the themes and topics we can select are bound by what the collection can support.

[7] The idea that archives or archivists can remain neutral has been challenged in numerous publications and conference sessions in the past few decades. Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009); R. Punzalan and M. Caswell, "Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2016): 25–42; and Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 339-356.
[8] Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator* 14, no. 1 (March 1971): 11-24.
[9] Exhibition years for traveling exhibitions reflect the inaugural date.

When planning for the 2020-2021 exhibition in the Nahmad Gallery, *Are We Next? Fear and Social Roles in WWII*, the curator and the PCMC staff discussed their desire and ability to represent the wartime experiences of women and the West Indian communities that lived and worked alongside the white civilian and military men in the Canal Zone. Sadly, the only way that we could get close to their stories and experiences was through materials created by or for the white men–we had little to nothing from those groups themselves. The lenses through which we were able to view the female experience were often-dehumanizing representations and stories in local military publications; invitations to serve as "Patriettes" and accompanying instructions on how to properly behave when entertaining soldiers; as well as press photos and U.S.O. ephemera. We have nothing that really tells us what it was like, what societal pressures they felt, or if and how they struggled. The same was true for the experience of the West Indian community, only to a far greater degree. We searched for an entry point and found only distant vantage points from which to view the story. We identified a restricted military photo that references a "Silver Camp," which would have been a place for West Indian laborers to live while they worked, likely on a critical defense project, but the "Silver Camp" sign is barely legible in the background, and it is far from the subject of the image. We referenced the 1940 fire in the Panamanian city of Colon that devastated and reshaped both the city and the West Indian community, but none of the photos of the event in the collection were taken by a member of that community—they are all voyeuristic stills of something that happened to someone else. And truly, this fire was just a tragic event that happened to coincide with WWII; it was not caused by the war, so its relationship to the exhibition is tenuous at best. Quite frankly, despite months of research and searching the collection, the representative voice that we were able to provide fell woefully short of our expectations. Because of these kinds of limitations in the collections, thus far we have only been able to scratch the surface of the intricately woven world of the different communities surrounding the Canal.

Archives professionals, like their counterparts in the museum profession, are focusing currently on social justice and the need for diversity and inclusion. These are not new topics–there have been multiple calls for greater diversity and representation in recent decades–but the frequency and intensity of the discussion has increased in the past few years.[10] Some professionals question whether archivists should be activists and champions of social justice or if they should seek to be passive, objective stewards (at least to the extent that it is possible for any person to be objective).[11] This discussion is happening at UF among both museum and archives professionals regarding the PCMC and is further complicated by the history of the collection and its community of supporters. When the collection was acquired, UF made a commitment to the Panama Canal Museum board that we would continue their mission to document the U.S. history of the Canal. A friends group was established in 2012, and the executive council was comprised of the board members of the former Panama Canal Museum board, which ensured the continuance of their perspectives and priorities. Although the membership has changed in the intervening years, the executive council members are primarily white Zonians, and they generously support the collection with funds and gifts of materials. In other words, for almost a decade, our single most important relationship has been with members of the Zonian community. However, this relationship simultaneously erodes our

[10] Similar to discussions relating to neutrality and social justice, there have been numerous publications and conference sessions in recent years relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the archival profession. Ellen Engseth, "Cultural Competency: A Framework for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Archival Profession in the United States." *The American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2018): 460-482; Mary A. Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal, editors, *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2014); and Chris Taylor, "Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion," *The American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 19-29.

[11] For various perspectives on this topic, see *The American Archivist* 82, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2019): 598-631, accessed November 30, 2020, https://meridian.allenpress.com/american-archivist/issue/82/2.

ability to remain objective and limits our ability to engage in social justice activities such as curating exhibitions that challenge the stories and perspectives of white Zonians.

The PCMC collects materials that document the American era of the Canal, which is a collecting scope inherited from the Panama Canal Museum. However, the PCMC team at UF interprets the "American era" in the broadest sense: all aspects of Canal history in the twentieth century are fair game. To reduce the significant gaps in the representation of some groups, we are prioritizing collecting activities relating to those groups. For example, we are in the process of creating promotional materials to raise awareness among descendants of West Indian laborers that we are interested in preserving their materials. However, this prioritization in collecting activities does not mean that we are going to stop collecting materials from white Zonians so that we can increase the percentage of representation of underrepresented and marginalized groups. Some archives professionals might argue that we should do more to promote social justice and correct inequities by focusing solely on collecting from these groups, but it is our responsibility to adhere to the PCMC mission and collect *all* materials that document the Canal's history.

In order to take on the educational and social engagement work of cultural heritage repositories, we agree that we must expand our representation, and we are working towards greater diversity in the holdings. In the meantime, however, there are differing opinions between archives and museum professionals at UF about how we create interpretations in exhibits and when teaching classes. Some museum professionals on the PCMC team and professors who teach with the collection are interested in promoting social justice; they are willing to introduce more subjectivity to get a point across, and they are thrilled when they can be provocative, particularly towards the Zonian community. In contrast, the archivists and librarians tend to be more interested in remaining objective and in sharing historical information without championing a cause.

One recent example illustrates this difference in the two approaches. A 2019 exhibition, *An American Canal in Panama,* examined international relations between the U.S. and Panama throughout the twentieth century. The theme of the exhibition was a significant step towards addressing difficult topics, and the museum professionals in particular had been advocating for the opportunity to engage audiences with more challenging topics. Some of the exhibits focused on a tumultuous period in 1964 when an altercation between U.S. and Panamanian students and a torn Panamanian flag triggered multiple days of armed conflict with multiple deaths. Panamanians claimed that Zonian students ripped their flag during a confrontation, but U.S. citizens and officials claimed that the incident was staged and the flag was intentionally torn by the Panamanians prior to the confrontation, to ignite protests. Many Zonians refer to this incident as the Flag Riots, and the Panamanians refer to it as Martyr's Day. In creating the labels for these cases, two of the three exhibit curators, both museum professionals, were adamant that they wanted to portray the white Zonians as antagonists who desecrated the Panamanian flag and to state unequivocally that the flag was torn during the pushing and shoving between the students. The third curator, an archivist, wanted to take a more impartial approach and state that both sides claimed that the other had torn the flag, but regardless of the truth, the torn flag became the symbol that sparked the subsequent protests and conflict. In the end, majority opinion prevailed, and the exhibit label read that "… during the altercation the Panamanian flag tore."[12]

[12] "An American Canal in Panama," Online Exhibit, University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries (2019), accessed July 12, 2020, http://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/AmericanCanal.

This example perfectly illustrates how museum professionals at UF are willing to be a little more subjective and provocative in order to advocate for fairness and social justice, to represent the oppressed, to give voice to the marginalized. And there is a good argument for this approach because history belongs to the winners; if we do not promote a particular viewpoint when crafting the interpretation in PCMC exhibits, there is a chance that the stories and perspectives of those underrepresented groups might remain buried. However, shouldn't it be our role as stewards of history, especially at an institution of higher learning, to provide historical facts and to educate as accurately and neutrally as we can, so that our audiences can engage, discuss, analyze, and decide for themselves? All of the museum professionals and archivists at UF hope to foster discussion and debate, and we all want to have greater diversity in the collection in order to tell a wider range of stories, but there are diverging opinions about our role in interpreting history. We like to think that the PCMC exhibits are more effective precisely because the team has to navigate these differing viewpoints.

The diversity of representation in the PCMC is improving gradually. Expanded collecting efforts ensure that research and education needs are supported and also permit a wider range of stories and themes in exhibits. However, it is equally important to examine the archival description of underrepresented and marginalized groups in the PCMC to ensure that the collection is not perpetuating terminology that is racist, oppressive, or disrespectful to these groups.

Diversity of Descriptions

When we acquired the PCMC from the Panama Canal Museum, we inherited a lack of diversity regarding representation that was a legacy of the societal structure in the Canal Zone and the white Zonians who created the collection. That legacy is also manifest in the information provided by donors, in the descriptive metadata that was created by the community members managing the museum, and in the information embedded in the materials themselves. This lack of diversity in the descriptions reflects the knowledge the museum personnel and donors were capable of sharing, as well as their intentional or unintentional biases, but it also exists because of biases and societal norms throughout the twentieth century (e.g., official image captions created by and for the dominant culture, as well as image compositions which often sequester marginalized communities to the background or sidelines). These factors often result in inappropriate or insensitive terminology, racially and culturally biased information, and descriptive records with titles that do not adequately describe objects beyond the primary subject or focus.

There are over twenty thousand descriptive records for the artifacts and archival materials in the PCMC. A significant majority of these records were created by Panama Canal Museum personnel and by UF student volunteers, rather than by archivists, museum professionals, or catalogers. Many of the materials were created in the first half of the century, and they have formal titles and captions that were commonly used at that time. It is therefore unsurprising that there are myriad problematic descriptions.

An example of a PCMC record with significant issues is a photograph of two indigenous Guna women dated from the 1930s with a title that is taken from a caption on the verso: "A couple of San Blas Indian beauties."[13] The Guna people have been referred to variously and incorrectly as "San Blas Indians," the "Cuna," and the "Kuna" for many years. At some point between the 1930s and 2002, when the photograph was acquired by the museum, someone wrote the caption on the verso and used the term "San Blas Indian." The person responsible for

[13] See the online resource at https://ufdc.ufl.edu/pcmi007298/.

cataloging this photo at the former Panama Canal Museum attempted to improve the description and make the record more discoverable by including a note: "Two San Blas Indian Women stand in foreground with children near a hut in the background." However, the record still is problematic because the preferred term "Guna" is not included at all, the additional descriptive note perpetuates use of "San Blas Indian," and the offensive caption is used as the title of the object.

In 2019, a collector offered to donate thousands of postcards relating to the Canal and Panama, and while reviewing the contents of the collection, he specifically pointed to the presence of racist postcards, so that they would not be a surprise. The images and captions on the cards are horrible. The first is an illustrated postcard featuring three Black toddlers sitting on a log beside the river with an alligator at their feet with its mouth open, and the caption reads: "Alligator Bait, On the Chagres River, Panama Canal."[14] The second is a postcard featuring a crying Black toddler sitting in tall grass with an alligator approaching with its mouth open, and the caption reads: "Alligator Preparing for Lunch, Chagres River, Panama." The cards should be preserved because they provide evidence of a racist attitude that Black lives have no value, and unfortunately, they also provide evidence of the horrific practice of using Black children as "gator bait," a practice that was documented in the first half of the twentieth century.[15] However, the images are offensive and undoubtedly will cause distress to some individuals.[16] Therefore, we have decided that the descriptive record will include a note alerting researchers to the presence of offensive images and text, and explain that the postcards are preserved in part because they demonstrate racist imagery, language, practices, and opinions. Physically, we will place the postcards in opaque envelopes with the same note on the outside of the envelopes. We decided to retain the original titles because they are the printed titles on the cards and if read without seeing the associated images it is not as apparent that they describe offensive and racist imagery.

We also have numerous records with shallow titles in the PCMC. These records have titles that do not reflect or reference any subsurface subject or context. A significant portion of the records with this problem are related to townsites or buildings associated with the West Indian communities in the Canal Zone. From the early through the mid-twentieth century, the townsites in the Canal Zone were segregated–the terms "Silver" or "local rate" demarcated the towns where non-white laborers lived. We have numerous photographs and materials pertaining to these towns, such as Paraiso, Rainbow City, Gamboa, and Red Tank, to name only a few. Typically, the records for these materials only provide the name of the town itself and do not provide additional descriptive information. If a researcher looking for materials pertaining to West Indian laborers failed to search for all of these town names, they would miss a treasure trove of resources. For example, there are three important photos albums from the 1940s-1950s showing the school buildings, classrooms, and students from a number of the school systems in these towns.[17] The record titles are "Latin American Schools," and their descriptive notes mention town names and the word "Silver," but there are no subject keywords related to West Indian people, nothing to provide context, and nothing to enhance searchability. To remove this

[14] Following the guidelines developed by the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Working Group, we are using the term "Black" through this article. Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Working Group, "Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources" (October 2019), accessed July 12, 2020, https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf.

[15] Sandra L. Henderson, "The Face of Empire: The Cultural Production of U.S. Imperialism in the Panama Canal Zone and California, 1904–1916," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016), 163-167, http://hdl.handle.net/2142/90882.

[16] The collecting of racist materials relating to alligators is doubly problematic for the University of Florida where Gator sporting events have routinely featured a "Gator Bait" cheer. Although there is no evidence that the UF cheer has racist origins, the University decided in June 2020 to stop using the cheer because of the racist history of the phrase. See the statement by President Kent Fuchs, June 18, 2020, http://statements.ufl.edu/statements/2020/june/another-step-toward-positive-change-against-racism.html.

[17] See the online resources at http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI013242/00001, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI013240/00001, and http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI006516/00001.

onus from researchers, we have decided that we will edit these records to provide context (i.e., to explicitly state information about the town's history, population, and geographic location). This can be particularly challenging when dealing with archival materials described at aggregate levels, because there are missed opportunities to identify materials that have embedded insensitive or disrespectful terminology or that contain information about marginalized groups.

More problematic are those situations in which Panamanians, people of West Indian descent, or members of the indigenous communities appear in photographs with white Americans, but are not described or identified. There are many examples where a group of white people are identified by name while the marginalized people are not identified, and sometimes their presence in the photo is not even noted. We have one unique example in which two separate donors gifted the same 1943 photograph that includes both white and non-white men. One donor wrote the names of all the men on the back; the other donor wrote the names of only the white men.[18] This very clearly demonstrates the impact of the kind of information donors knew or deemed significant enough to document. Without the copy that provided the complete list of names, the identities of the non-white men would be lost to history.

There are numerous examples where terms such as "blacks," "colored," "West Indian," "Native," "Negro," "Afro-Antillian," "Antilles," etc. are used to describe Black people or groups. One example is a photograph with a printed caption that reads "Negroes at Work Near Cristobal, Panama."[19] Another photograph has the title, "A portrait of three adults and one child; the word 'Natives' is written on the back."[20] This title was likely created by the student volunteers, who simply took what information that they had and wrote it as a title. Currently there is nothing in the record to indicate that the three individuals are of West Indian descent. Not all of these terms are offensive, of course, but use of the terms can cause problems for discovery and access: researchers may not know some historical terms (e.g., "Native" or "Antillies"), they may not know that they need to try searching using multiple terms, and it can be a shocking experience for researchers who are not used to encountering these terms. Are we perpetuating racially biased terms by including them in our descriptions? On the other hand, as archives and museum professionals, we try to remain true to formal titles given by creators. After all, the formal title conveys as much information about the creator as it does the subject of the object. If we systematically change these terms to something more respectful to the subjects and more palatable for researchers, are we unintentionally revising history? Perhaps we should let historical records speak for themselves. If creators used the language of racism, it is our responsibility to preserve evidence of that racism. We must balance our need to preserve historical evidence, regardless of how much we may dislike that evidence, with our need to be respectful and inclusive of underrepresented groups and marginalized people.

There has been increased discussion in the archives and museum professions about changing descriptions in order to update information, to provide a consistent and more searchable vocabulary, or to replace offensive terms or language. There have been multiple sessions at recent archives conferences, reports and publications, blog posts, and other activities in the archival profession relating to diversity in description.[21] Many of these discussions have focused on actions such as standardizing the use of less-offensive terms, but proponents admit that it will be difficult to reach consensus about the best terms (what may be inoffensive to some

[18] See the online resources at http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI002937/00001 and http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI009276/00001.
[19] See the online resource at https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00015130.
[20] See the online resource at http://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI003554/00001.
[21] Annie Tang, Dorothy Berry, Kelly Bolding, and Rachel E. Winston, "Toward Culturally Competent Archival (Re)Description of Marginalized Histories" (presentation, Society of American Archivists conference, Washington, D.C., August 2018), accessed July 12, 2020, https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=library_presentations; and . https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2018/edi-survey%20instrument-092017.pdf.

may be offensive to others). Some repositories are taking a different approach by providing diversity, equity, and inclusivity disclaimers or warnings on their websites and discovery systems to explain that the terminology reflects attitudes of bygone eras that many would find offensive today.

In the museum world, there is less focus on formal titles assigned by artists or creators; most of the discussion centers around changing titles generated by the gallery, dealer, donor, or museum. The most well-known example of a museum changing the titles and descriptions of artwork is the Rijksmuseum's "Adjustment of Colonial Terminology," an initiative designed to rename artworks that have offensive titles and descriptions, particularly online.[22] One notable example is a painting from 1906 by Simon Maris previously titled *Young Negro-Girl,* which was changed to *Young Woman With a Fan*, and since additional research uncovered the sitter's name, is now titled *Isabella*.[23] Wall labels are another place where museums have started to change language and address difficult issues traditionally deemed too controversial to be a part of descriptive text. One example is the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, which updated its labels to include statements about slavery as a means of economic status for the sitters in many of the collection's portraits.[24]

The archives and museum professionals at UF who are grappling with these issues are concerned that significant changes in descriptive practices could be a slippery slope leading to reduced objectivity. Our position in the public trust and our commitment to accessibility does sharpen the razor's edge. It becomes critically important for those who are responsible for writing titles, descriptions, and exhibit labels to do their homework, so to speak, and to constantly examine and evaluate the directions in which their words may point the reader/viewer, as well as the things that their words might omit or obscure.

Future Activities

In looking to the future, we are dedicating significant resources to addressing the issues of diversity that face our collection, and we have a number of projects created specifically for this effort. A primary example is the partnership that we have developed with Pan Caribbean Sankofa, Inc., a group of business professionals, scholars, artists, advocates, and philanthropists whose mission is to advise organizations and individuals interested in the diaspora of the Caribbean people, focusing on the history of the Panama Railroad and the Panama Canal. As partners we have developed initiatives to collect oral histories and materials of West Indian descendants that will be shared with an international audience through UF platforms. Acknowledging the community's expertise in their own history, giving its members agency, and ensuring participatory access are key components.

PCMC and Pan Caribbean Sankofa recently received an internal UF grant to co-host panel discussions and interactive photography exhibitions focused on the West Indian community in Panama. Members of Pan Caribbean Sankofa will guide the process of selecting photographs from the PCMC, ensuring that those images that are most meaningful and historically significant to the community will be displayed. These events will encourage and provide opportunities for community members to document context and historical information that will be used to enrich the collection's metadata and descriptions. We expect that these

[22] "Terminology," Netherlands Rijksmuseum, accessed January 18, 2020, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/research/our-research/overarching/terminology.
[23] "Isabella, Simon Maris, c. 1906," Netherlands Rijksmuseum, accessed July 12, 2020, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2931.
[24] "Worcester Art Museum signs shine light on American slave trade," *Worcester Magazine,* June 28, 2018, accessed July 12, 2020, https://www.worcestermag.com/2018/06/28/worcester-art-museum-signs-shine-light-on-american-slave-trade.

events also will lead to oral history interviews with participants, so that we can preserve their stories.

This partnership pairs well with a separate initiative we are developing in response to our own collection management and exhibition needs and to the increased research demand for materials related to West Indian laborers. As a preliminary step, we have created a database to track all the photographs in our collection that depict individuals who appear to be Black and who are also not part of an indigenous community or of Spanish-Panamanian heritage. The decision to create this inventory did not come without a great deal of discussion about logistics and pitfalls. In almost all of the photographs, it is impossible for us to determine with definitive accuracy if an individual is of West Indian descent, African-American, or from another country. After debating how best to identify people of West Indian descent, we chose to err on the side of overinclusion, and we included in our list any photograph with a distinguishable depiction of a Black person. During the second phase of this project, PCMC will be working with a UF faculty member and a graduate student to conduct additional research into the photographs, identifying locations and people of the West Indian communities associated with the Canal. This will allow us to better describe the materials in order to increase discoverability and accessibility.

Our collaborative activities with Pan Caribbean Sankofa also give us the perfect opportunity to advance plans to incorporate additional bilingual metadata in the collection. We already have some resources that are described with Spanish language metadata, such as printed books and maps that have creator-supplied titles in Spanish. However, we have to make an effort to provide Spanish language metadata throughout the collection, so that we can reach stakeholder audiences. Many people of West Indian descent speak both Spanish and English, and many are citizens of the Republic of Panama; we also have some materials relating to Panamanians and the history of Panama. It is logical that we would describe PCMC materials with bilingual English-Spanish metadata, so that we can ensure these materials are as accessible to Spanish-speaking researchers as they are to English-speaking researchers.[25] Although it will be a labor-intensive, long-term project to realize the goal of bilingual metadata throughout a collection as large and complex as the PCMC, we can begin by updating collection-level metadata and by adding bilingual metadata to records that we are editing for other reasons.

Moving forward, our efforts will focus on correcting and enhancing legacy metadata supplied by the Panama Canal Museum or donors. When formal titles or captions include language that is considered racist, offensive, or inappropriate, we will supply a new title, and we will include the original title within a note elsewhere in the descriptive record. In cases where the full original title may not be racist or offensive, we may alter titles by removing or changing a particular word, but we will still retain the original title elsewhere in the record. We have decided to retain the title because the creator-supplied title or caption is a key piece of information that researchers may use to identify the item, and also because it does provide evidence of the racist and offensive language used at that time. We will document the altering of titles in the descriptive record, and we will also provide contextual historical information in the descriptive record acknowledging that the original title or caption includes racist or offensive words that are inappropriate today but represent the words, beliefs, and actions of the time.

An example of this approach is the PCMC photo that includes a printed caption supplied by the creator: “Sleeping quarters for Negro Laborers.”[26] We plan to change this title to “Sleeping quarters for Black Laborers.” We will retain the original title in a descriptive note and

[25] Margarita Vargas Betancourt, Jessica L. English, Melissa Jerome, and Angelibel Soto, “Contesting Colonial Library Practices of Accessibility and Representation,” *Archives and Special Collections as Sites of Contestation*, ed. Mary Kandiuk (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2020).
[26] See the online resource at https://ufdc.ufl.edu/PCMI003201/00001.

include contextual information explaining that we are retaining the potentially offensive term supplied by the creator because it provides evidence about the creator and the vocabulary used historically. We also will note that we have used the term "Black" based on professional best practices such as those developed by the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia's Anti-Racist Description Working Group.[27] We will take a similar approach when modifying records relating to the Guna and other indigenous people by changing terms like "Natives" or "Indians" and including explanatory notes about the appropriate terminology. Additionally, we plan to have a disclaimer on the PCMC website that explains our commitment to respect, diversity, and the preservation of historical objectivity, and notifies the researcher that they could encounter terms, images, or themes that are upsetting.

We will apply these same procedures to modify the records of digital objects containing racist, offensive, or inappropriate text. In situations where the images themselves are problematic, we will include a cover image in the digital object that includes a message alerting viewers that the subsequent image could be offensive. In the example used earlier in this article, the photo of the "San Blas Indian beauties" will have a cover image added and the title would be changed to "Two Guna women." The original title will be retained in a note field, along with added contextual information. By taking actions like this, we hope to avoid situations in which a researcher encounters an image that causes them distress without advance warning and the opportunity to avoid seeing the image and related text.

We are continually looking for opportunities to expand our network of stakeholders both internally and externally. We will continue to seek out new scholarship and foster strong relationships with our guest researchers, because the perspectives and information that they bring to light will continue to inform our work. This common practice takes on a new depth of importance for collections that deal with a subject whose long-established canon is so heavily weighted to one perspective. In the past two years, we have consulted with scholars specializing in the history and culture of indigenous people, so that we can better understand the objects that we manage, and so that we can describe them accurately. We also have asked them to recommend individuals who are not white Zonians who could be interviewed as part of our oral history program.

Recently, we have discussed the idea of forming a student group at UF that includes anyone with ties to the Canal – relatives of Zonians, Panamanians, Afro-Caribbean people…the list can go on. Our hope in creating this group would be to build a more cohesive foundation for the collection's future, one based on common ties and mutual respect, and that by establishing an environment in which everyone is an equal stakeholder, we could build a more diverse donor base and user community. We will continue to evaluate, re-evaluate, and reconsider as we move forward. Keeping an open mind and open dialogue between all of the different stakeholders is the best way to ensure that our definition of "progress" is respectful and thoughtful, both of humanity and its history.

[27] Again, see "Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources."

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