



## Statement on Potentially Harmful Language and Content Found in Collections

The American Heritage Center aspires to approach all areas of our work in ways that are respectful to those who create, use, and are represented in our collections. For a variety of reasons, however, users may encounter offensive or harmful language or images in some of our finding aids, catalogs, and collection materials.

Note that the AHC does not censor or alter contents of the collections as they provide context and evidence of a time, people, place, or event. Therefore, we encourage users to bring questions and concerns about descriptions in our finding aids to our attention via [email](#) or [anonymous web-form](#).

### Why are you seeing this statement?

*Some of our materials may contain offensive content.*

The American Heritage Center collects material from a wide range of people, groups, institutions, and time periods. This means that some of the material within our collections expresses opinions and contains language not aligned with the AHC's core values. As a cultural institution dedicated to preserving the records within our care, the AHC maintains the authenticity of the materials by not censoring content. Any such censorship would alter the meaning or intention of the original creator, as well as strip the material of its historical integrity and cultural context.

*Some of our finding aids, catalog records, and other metadata may contain offensive, outdated, or inaccurate terminology.*

The American Heritage Center has been working to collect, preserve, and provide access to archives for over 75 years. Many terms that were commonly used to describe certain groups and individuals over the years are clearly inappropriate to use today, whether they were offensive at the time or not. We cannot claim to know what was in the hearts and minds of past archivists, but we strive to describe the creators and subjects of our collections by using respectful language that the involved communities currently use to describe themselves.

Please note that there are occasions when we have judged it appropriate to include a creator's original titles of works or of folders even if they include inappropriate language when we describe the collection. Such decisions are always made after careful consideration.

*Some of our finding aids, catalog records, and other metadata may contain inaccurate racial, cultural, or other demographic information.*

The title of a photograph, for example, may indicate that the people depicted were members of one tribe when they were really members of another. Wherever we are aware of such errors, we

include the correct information in descriptive notes, but we often will retain the original title that the creator used for their work.

### **What are we doing about it?**

The AHC does not censor or alter content of the collections as they provide context and evidence of a time, people, place, or event. Any such censorship would alter the meaning or intention of the original creator, as well as strip the material of its historical integrity and cultural context. The AHC is committed to preserving a diverse selection of American and world culture, and we continue to accept and seek out materials depicting a wide range of views, regardless of whether they align with our stated core values.

As we move forward, we continually strive to make sure that we are using accurate and respectful language to describe the people and communities who have created or have been depicted in the records that we hold.

Whenever we come across inappropriate language that was created by the original creator of the work, we perform an assessment to decide if that language is necessary for our users to find and identify the item in question. If the inappropriate language is not necessary, we remove it from the finding aid or catalog record, but we do not censor the item itself. If the inappropriate language cannot be removed without hindering our users' ability to find and identify the related item, we edit the record to clarify that we are using the creators' original language, generally through the use of quotation marks.

Whenever we come across inaccurate demographic information used by a creator to describe the subject, we indicate that we are preserving the creator's original language by use of quotation marks, and we provide the accurate information in an explanatory note.

### **What to do if you come across concerning language or content?**

We are not perfect, and we have over 95,000 cubic feet of collection materials. It is possible that you may find some of the above-described problems before we do. If you see something inaccurate or offensive, we encourage you to report it to us by [email](#) or [anonymous web-form](#).

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns about our ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.