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Critical Cataloging, the User, and You

March 15, 2022

Slides:

go.uncg.edu/ncccla2022-critcat

NC Community College
Association 2022
Conference

Presenters



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Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land we are gathered on has long served as the site of meeting and exchange amongst a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Eno, Keyauwee, Occaneechi, Saura, and Shakori. We also want to acknowledge the long history and lasting legacies of slavery on these lands.

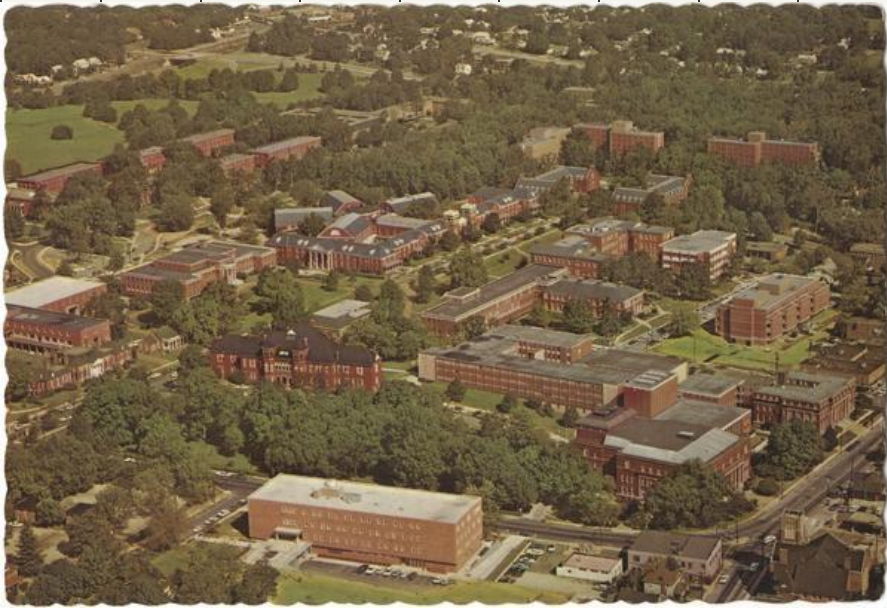


Image credit: "Aerial view of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro" in 037: Campus Views - Aerial (1950-1989), Special Collections and University Archives, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. 1972.

Agenda



1. Introduction to Critical Librarianship



2. Introduction to Critical Cataloging



3. Importance of Critical Cataloging to Librarianship



4. Implementing Critical Cataloging Concepts



5. Critical Cataloging Projects in Progress @ UNCG



Introduction to Critical Librarianship

Critical theory

“Critical theory switches the question of truth into a question of power. It tries to unmask the power relationships that lie behind our ideas of what is true.” ([Cluley, 2011](#))

- Who holds power? Why? How?
- Who experiences oppression? Why How?
- How do infrastructures and systems create and reinforce power and oppression?



Critical librarianship

- How might disability or socioeconomic status impact a user's ability to access library spaces, programs, or materials?
- Do any fees or building/resource usage policies impact some people more than others?
- Are all users able to find and use what they need, without experiencing harm?

Principles of critical librarianship

Critical librarianship (Drabinski, 2019):

- Interrogates the work of power in structures and systems
- Acknowledges the social, economic, and political context of library policies and processes
- Surfaces hidden labor
- Articulates the infrastructures that enable some lines of inquiry and not others
- Knows that the world could be different



Areas of critical librarianship

- Physical & digital accessibility
 - Materials & infrastructure
- Types, timing, & accessibility of programming
- Collection development
- Sensitive cultural materials
- Organization & description
- Public policies



Library workers

- Deliberate efforts to recruit and retain diverse group of employees (University at Buffalo LibGuide)
- Implementing hiring & promotion practices that promote equity
 - Re-evaluating requirements in job postings
 - The problem of “fit”
 - Pay transparency



More examples of engagement

- Evaluating and improving accessibility of library resources (Kimura, 2018)
- Crafting equitable collection development policies
- Assessing user policies
 - Eliminating overdue fines
 - Time caps on resources
- Critical evaluation of information organization and description





Introduction to Critical Cataloging

What is critical cataloging?

- Offshoot of both critical librarianship & radical cataloging
- Critical cataloging is a subset of radical cataloging
 - (Watson, 2020)



”

“Being user focused with regard to *your* library’s users ...having a healthy dose of skepticism about the quality of readily available bibliographic records...knowing when and how to make cataloging decisions that may conflict with traditional cataloging standards...”

(Roberto, 2008)



”...social justice-oriented style of radical cataloging that places an emphasis on radical empathy, outreach work, and recognizes the importance of information maintenance and care.”

(Watson, 2020)



Background Literature

Prejudices and antipathies: a tract on the LC subject heads concerning people (2nd ed, 1993)

Sanford Berman

Radical cataloging: Essays at the front (2008)

K.R. Roberto (ed)

Other scholars

- M. Adler (2017)
- E. Drabinski (2013)
- H. Olson (2001)

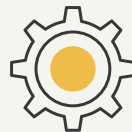




Importance of Critical Cataloging to Librarianship

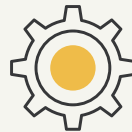
Resource access & discovery

- Metadata enhancement aids in resource access and discovery
- Critical cataloging efforts can encourage conscious metadata editing or spur enhancement
- Improvements in metadata also extend to name authority data



Access & discovery: examples

- Metadata that reflects the way users search improves discovery
 - Asexuality (Sexual orientation) & Asexual people ([Watson, 2020](#))
- Zine archives and queer-centered special collections difficult to describe using LCSH
 - [Homosaurus](#)



Harm mitigation

- Reduce the possibility of library users and personnel encountering harm while using library systems and resources
- Origin of many systems used within libraries (like classification and subject headings) were codified by those who hold the most power in our society



Harm mitigation: example

- Removing offensive and outdated terminology improves the user experience by reducing harm, thus encourages use of library resources
 - “Illegal aliens”
- Relevant, current, respectful language reduces harm to all users, including library workers



Values, neutrality, & inclusion

- Critical cataloging encourages questioning & even challenging assumed professional values
- Libraries are not neutral; upholds systemic oppression ([de jesus, 2014](#))



Values, neutrality, & inclusion

- Neutrality in cataloging valued to promote objectivity
- This neutrality in practice works against harm mitigation efforts
- Critical cataloging can promote inclusion as a professional value



Special collections & archives

- Archives often define the historical record: aggrandizing language perpetuate narratives of colonizers and oppressors ([Huffman & Lyon, 2021](#))
- Materials of indigenous peoples



Implementing Critical Cataloging Concepts

More than just MARC

Quick Note:

- Critical cataloging does not always involve traditional bibliographic description or MARC records
- Applies to other types of resource description and non-MARC metadata



Name authorities & ethics

Ethical Issues:

- Creator privacy
- Recording gender
- Culturally appropriate ways to capture data
- Ethical questions in name authority control (J. Sandberg, ed., 2019)
- How to implement:
 - Create or revisit local guidelines @ institution



Keeping up with LCSH

- Keep imported records up-to-date
- New LCSH proposals
 - Non-LC/non-SACO guide by Beck Schaefer
- Utilize ILS & Discovery layer tools:
 - TRLN subject remapping



Alternative CVs

- Controlled vocabularies (CVs) aside from LCSH
- Many CVs have MARC codes available for use in WorldCat
- Alternative CV list from Cataloging Lab

Example CVs:

- Getty vocabularies
- Homosaurus linked data vocabulary
- Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)
- RBMS vocabularies



Potential Challenges

- **Time**
 - Competing priorities
- **Expertise**
 - Staffing
 - Time to build knowledge
- **Support & buy-in**
 - Impacted by institutional culture, climate, & existing EDI engagement



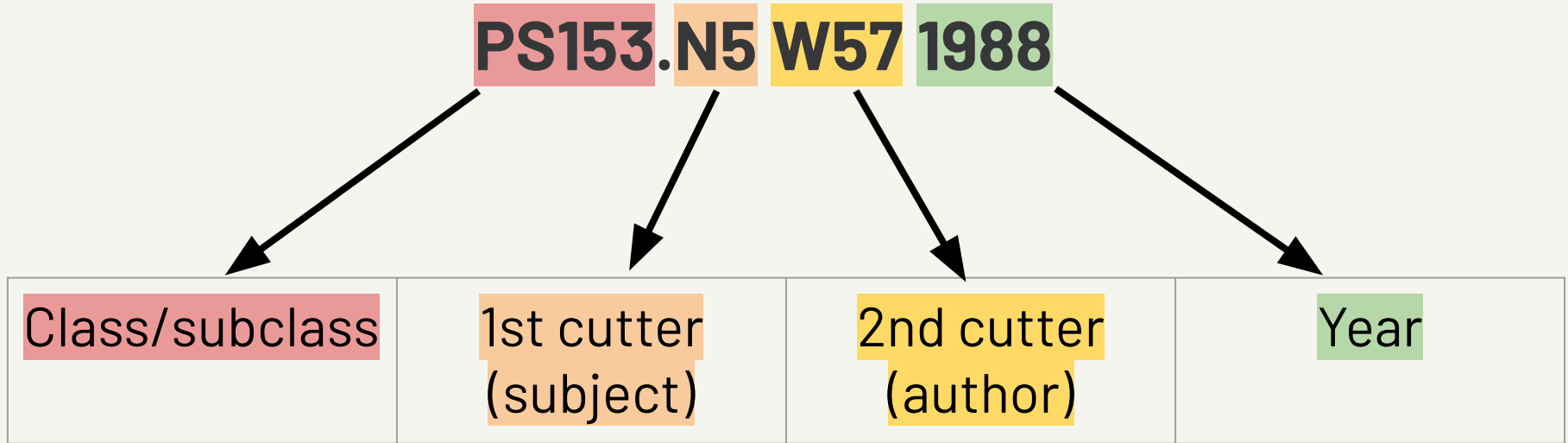


Critical Cataloging Projects in Progress @ UNCG

Context

- Technical Services department: 17 FTE
- Reparative Archives Working Group
 - Special Collections & University Archives Offensive Materials and Language Statement
- Diversity Committee, Hiring Practices Committee, EDI Initiatives Team
- No pushback on our critical cataloging work

Cutters

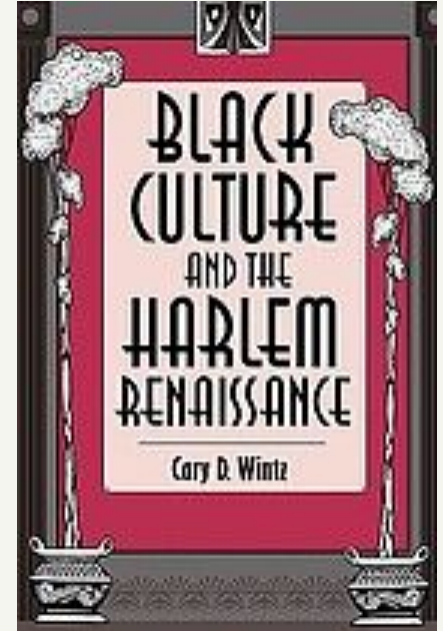


Cutter changes

Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance,
Cary D. Wintz

PS153.**N5** W57 1988 (old)

PS153.**B5** W57 1988 (new)

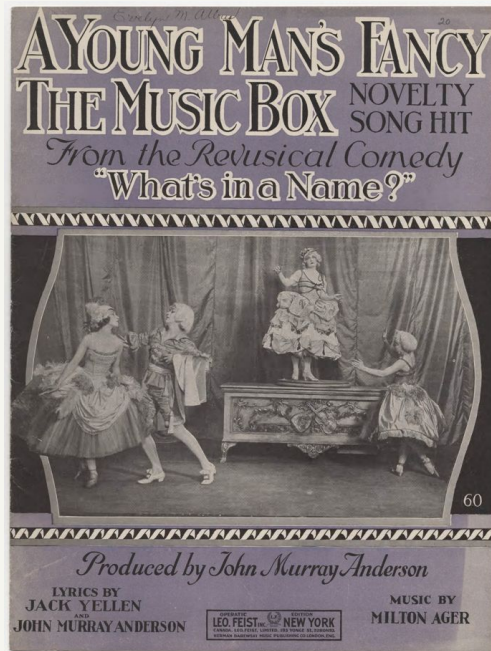


Cutter project & UL renovation

- UNCG library renovation will involve major weeding project, relocation of books
- General upheaval of library resources, spaces, and workflows
- Cutter project will impact and involve others in the library, inside and outside Tech Services

Robert C. Hansen Performing Arts Collection

- Collection as a whole contains a wide variety of works and ephemera related to the performing arts
- Digital collection of public domain sheet music is a subset, ~500 items
 - Primarily early 20th century
 - Mostly songs (include lyrics)
 - Most include visual content in covers

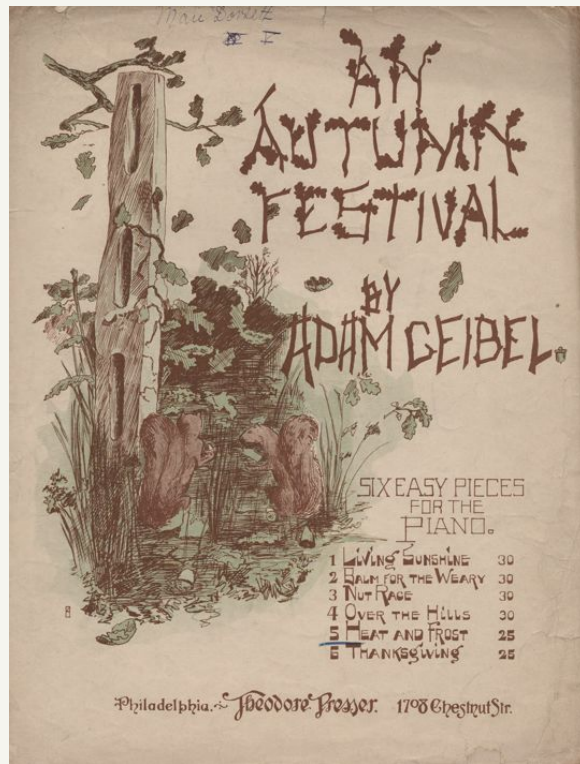


Hansen Collection metadata

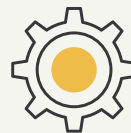
- Name authorities and LCSH description occurred in 2011 when the subset of items was being digitized and made available
- Some subject headings were extracted from existing OCLC records for the items; others were supplied by the project cataloger
- Remediation needed due to the offensive nature of many items in the collection, inadequacy of LCSH, traditional cataloging practices

Hansen project

- Goals:
 - Improve description accuracy
 - Apply respectful and ethical terminology
 - Document work
- Iterative approach: read, think, discuss, repeat
- 20% flagged in initial review



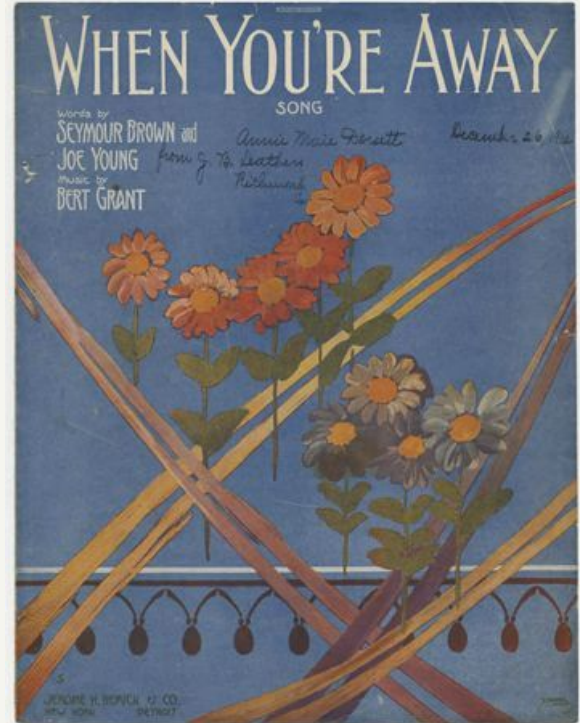
Identified issues



- Racism – particularly against Black people
 - Blackface art, minstrelsy
 - Legacy of slavery
 - Other racist language and/or images
- Colonialism, exoticism, orientalism, xenophobia
- Misogyny, sexism
- Disparaging language and/or images targeting racial, ethnic, and other minority groups

Challenges

- Satisfactory terms expressing these concepts are often not established in CVs
- These issues are often subtle, coded, and passing



Useful headings



- AAT
 - exoticism
 - racial discrimination
 - Orientalism
 - sex discrimination
- LCSH
 - Minstrel music
 - Minstrel shows
 - Blackface entertainers
 - Blackface
- LCGFT
 - Humorous songs
 - Minstrel music
 - Minstrel shows
- RBMS
 - Caricatures
 - Minstrel jokes
 - Minstrel songs
- TGM
 - Ethnic stereotypes

What have we learned?



- Historical context about this collection and its era
- Problematic content can't always be put in a box
- We often need to question our assumptions about and understandings of the materials & creators
- Not all the issues we've flagged will be addressed through metadata remediation
- This work is a process!



Thank you!

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Resources: <https://go.uncg.edu/ncccla2022-critcat-res>

Slides: <https://go.uncg.edu/ncccla2022-critcat>



Examples of objectionable materials

- Racism – particularly against Black people
 - Blackface art
 - Blackface minstrelsy
 - Legacy of slavery
 - Other racist language and/or images
- Colonialism
- Exoticism
- Misogyny, sexism
- Orientalism
- Xenophobia
- Disparaging language and/or images targeting racial, ethnic, and other minority groups

Credits



Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by [SlidesCarnival](#)
- Photographs by [Pexels](#)