

Statement on Harmful Language in Collections, Cataloging, and Description

The Wallace Library welcomes an ongoing dialogue with our history and how it has shaped our present. Our collections reflect the historical exclusion of the voices of people with disabilities, immigrants, LGBTQIA+ people, neurodiverse people, oppressed nationalities, people of color, survivors of sexual and domestic violence, women, and working class people. Their durability perpetuates structural inequity.

Users will encounter offensive or harmful language in descriptions of the works in our collection for a number of reasons.

When we create new descriptions or update old ones, we try to use terms that communities and individuals used to describe themselves, but most catalog records reuse language provided by creators, vendors, and previous owners, and the standards used to describe collections have evolved over time.

Some items retain their original descriptions to ensure that attitudes and viewpoints are not erased from the historical record, however repulsive they may be. We never censor the materials in our care, but we try to clarify instances where original language is retained by using quotation marks or providing additional historical context.

We use [Library of Congress Subject Headings](#) to facilitate access to materials in our collections. Some of these terms are offensive, and we advocate for Congress to change them. In the meantime, we replace harmful descriptions with suitable alternatives whenever possible.

We try to describe our materials with respect for all, but we are imperfect, ignorant, and biased. We will get things wrong, so we encourage feedback from our users. If you encounter language in our collections that you find offensive or harmful, please contact us at read@wheatoncollege.edu

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