

Harmful Content Statements : A DEI Initiative

By Shelley Rogers

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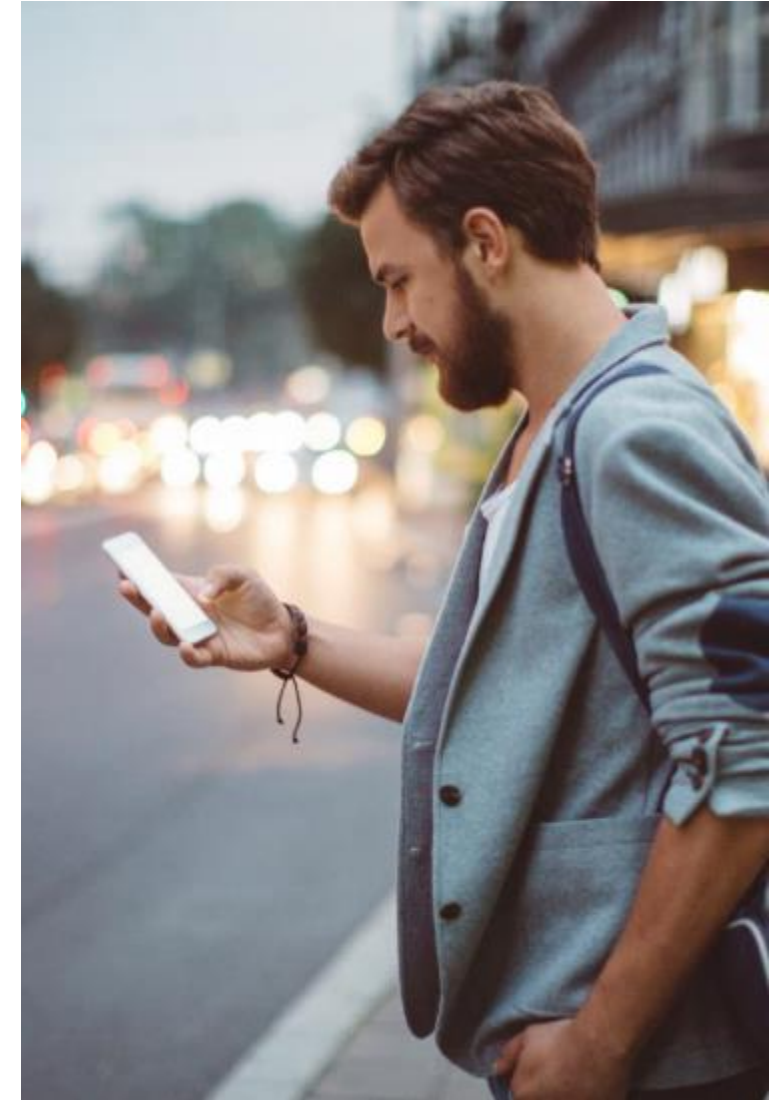
University of West Georgia

A presentation for the Southeast Chapter of the
Music Library Association Annual Conference on
October 15, 2021



Abstract

Harmful content statements, which **warn the public that materials with harmful language or images are present**, may be considered to have their roots in the film industry and are beginning to be utilized in library archives as a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative. This session will provide an overview, implementation at UWG, examples at other institutions, and hopefully good discussion among attendees.



Motion Picture Association film ratings

Its labels have been around for almost 53 years

The MPA, known as the Motion Picture Association of America from 1945 to 2019, has a rating system for films which went into effect on November 1, 1968. This rating system “is a voluntary scheme that is not enforced by law.”

G

G – General Audiences

All ages admitted.

Nothing that would offend parents for viewing by children.

PG

PG – Parental Guidance Suggested

Some material may not be suitable for children.

Parents urged to give "parental guidance". May contain some material parents might not like for their young children.

PG-13

PG-13 – Parents Strongly Cautioned

Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Parents are urged to be cautious. Some material may be inappropriate for pre-teenagers.

R

R – Restricted

Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian.

Contains some adult material. Parents are urged to learn more about the film before taking their young children with them.

NC-17

NC17 – Adults Only

No One 17 and Under Admitted.

Clearly adult. Children are not admitted. NC-17 replaced the X rating in 1990.

Other media use rating systems, primarily to protect children

Television programs are rated by TV Parental Guidelines.

Music is rated by the Recording Industry Association of America, which owns the PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT trademark (the “PAL Mark”).

Video games are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board.



"old tv set" by keen_seth is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)



Image from: <https://www.riaa.com/resources-learning/parental-advisory-label/>



"Video Games" by JeepersMedia is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

Film/media industry

Disclaimer statements are widely used

The film industry has used disclaimer statements for years. Everyone knows the phrase: "viewer discretion is advised." This typically warns of violent or sexual content that is inappropriate for children.



In more recent years, the film industry has expanded the use of warning statements that go beyond the basic viewer discretion disclaimer to notify viewers of racial slurs, gender stereotypes, et cetera that are present in the film. These statements are congruent with diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, and therefore can be viewed as DEI initiatives on the part of the film industry, including its distributors. I will show a couple examples in the next two slides.

**THIS FILM INCLUDES LANGUAGE AND/OR
CULTURAL STEREOTYPES THAT ARE
INCONSISTENT WITH TODAY'S STANDARDS
OF INCLUSION AND TOLERANCE AND
MAY OFFEND SOME VIEWERS.**

O Brother, Where Art Thou?

0:00

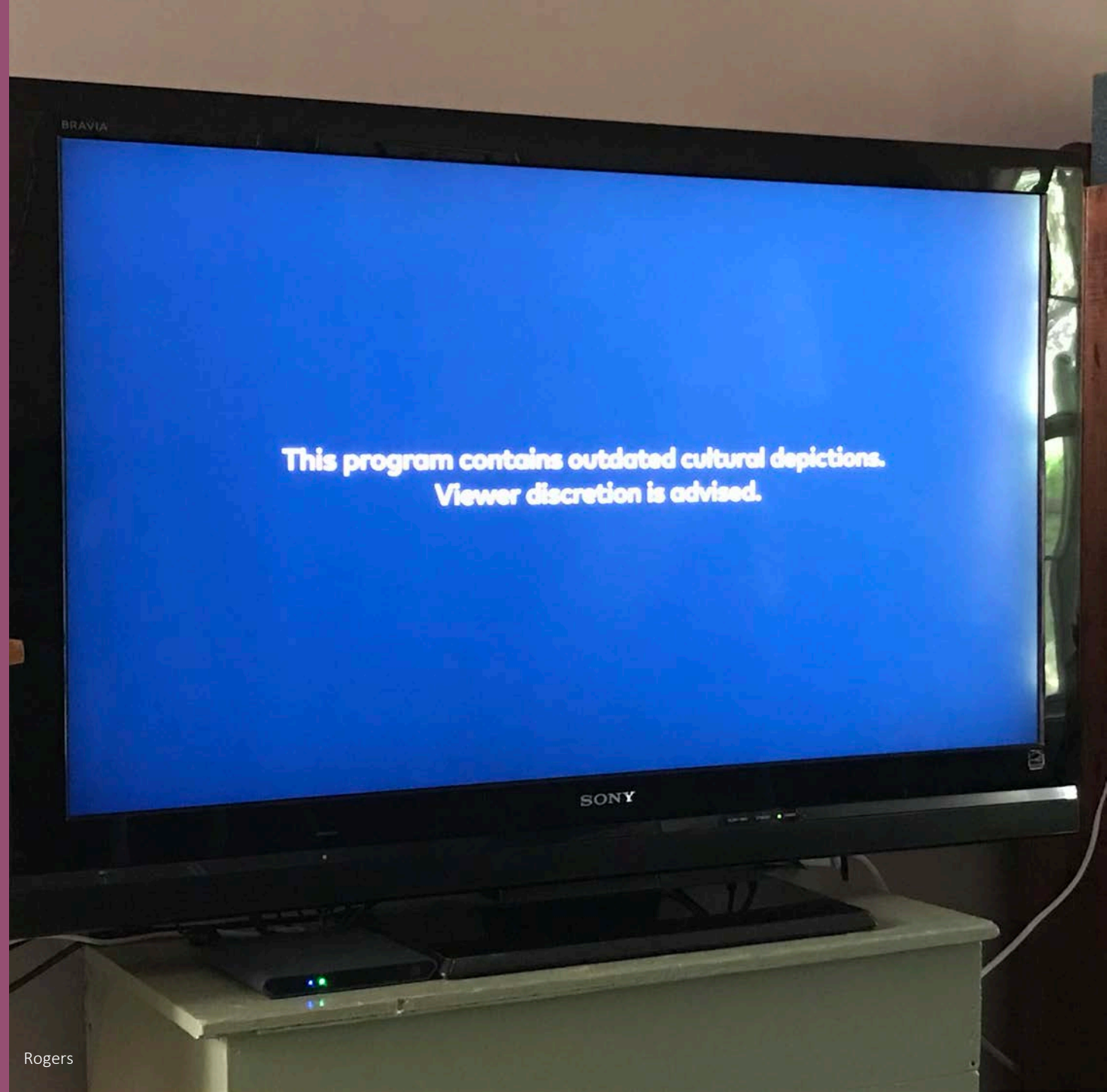


0:01:23 ||

Rogers

When I watched the 2000 film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* this past spring on the AMC channel, I saw this harmful content warning statement at the beginning of the movie. I don't think this disclaimer was present when the film was shown originally in 2000. The same message is shown at the beginning of *Forrest Gump* on AMC.

This statement appeared before an episode of *Bonanza* on TV Land in August 2021.



I think an important distinction is that the film and television industries **create** the content, whereas harmful content warning statements are appearing from companies and institutions who did not create the content, but instead are making the content **accessible**. We saw that in the previous AMC and TV Land warnings. We also see it with library archival collections. Before we dive into that, let's briefly consider the Internet's history regarding third-party content.



25 years battling harmful content



“Harmful content is anything online which causes a person distress or harm.”
(<https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/harmful-content-online-an-explainer>)

Since the beginning of the Internet, organizations with an online presence have attempted to monitor third-party content (user-generated content) in order to protect their community members from abuse. In the U.S., Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996 provides immunity for website platforms from third-party content. In recent years, the use of social media for harassment and hate speech has led to more political debate over amendments to Section 230.

Librarianship and the Archival Community

Archival collections have harmful content (language and images) supplied by the collections' creators. Archivists are currently discussing the topic of harmful content statements and beginning to write them.

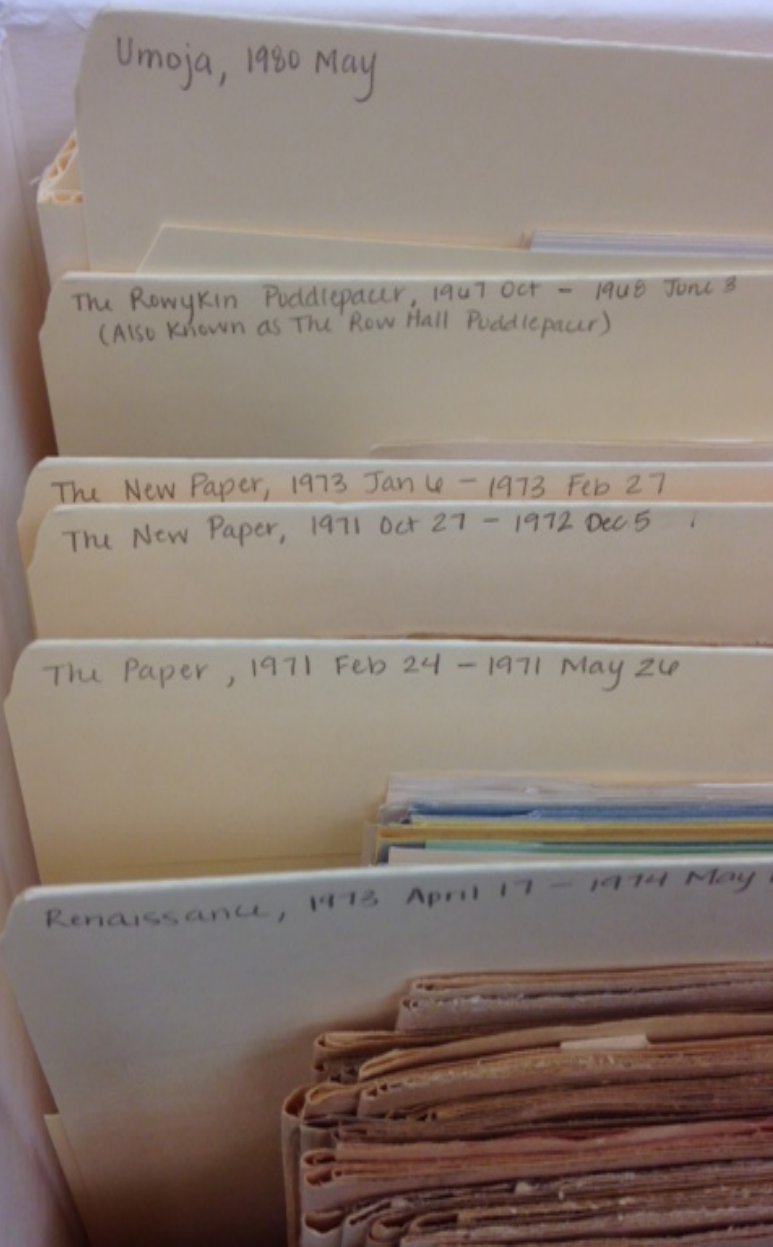
Social Media Accounts

In librarianship, we have established social media presences for our organizations on Facebook, Twitter, and others, and monitor those accounts for harmful content that could be supplied by users. A library professional typically reviews the content prior to its publication and exercises good judgment on whether the post should be permitted.



When I searched for research articles on the topic of harmful content statements, I found only one: a paper by Danielle Robichaud, an archivist at the University of Waterloo. This supports the contention of Blynné Olivieri, the Head of Special Collections at the University of West Georgia, that harmful language statements are a newly emerging topic among archivists.

A look inside an "Alternative publications" archival box at UWG.



In the University of Waterloo article by Danielle Robichaud, she describes how they examined and changed their descriptions of their archival collections. At my library, Blyne had already checked our archival descriptions, so this important activity was not part of the project I will be describing next.

Photos by Blyne Olivieri



The Special Collections Reading Room at UWG.

Special Collections at UWG

Special Collections is the repository for archival collections, rare books, and other unique materials in the Ingram Library at the University of West Georgia. Significant collecting areas include West Georgia History & Culture, Georgia's Political Papers and Oral History Program, Humanistic Psychology, and Human Consciousness collections. Special Collections also holds the University Archives, primary source materials which shed light on student life and the academic experience at UWG. Through these collections and through our work partnering with other community archives, Special Collections directly supports and enriches research, teaching, and learning at the University of West Georgia and promotes understanding and scholarship by members of the general public and academic communities.

<https://www.westga.edu/library/special-collections/about-special-collections.php>



The compact shelving in the basement of Ingram Library that houses books, maps, etc. of Special Collections. Additional archival collections are stored in acid-free boxes across the street from the library in an area with very tight security and environmental controls. Photo courtesy of Blyenne Olivieri.



At Ingram Library of the University of West Georgia, our Head of Special Collections, Blynne Olivieri, recently accepted an archival collection of family papers “that has numerous items containing a derogatory term.”

Blynne asked our Serials and Electronic Resources Cataloger, Miriam Nauenburg, and I to review information she compiled for us.

Blynnne's initial email

Laying out the situation

Blynnne wrote to Miriam and me on April 9, 2021. She asked us to consider several points regarding the new archival collection with derogatory terms.



Emory and Princeton's harmful language statements, and a blogpost that linked to several more.



Her initial draft of a warning note for the finding aid of this collection.



A new tool she was considering: a donor profile sheet, completed by the donor when signing the Deed of Gift, that asks them to voluntarily self-identify information.



To discuss these topics when we ready via a Google Meet.

We settled on a virtual meeting ten days later. In the meantime, I work best by thinking about a topic and jotting down my thoughts, so I shared several pages of notes for consideration via email halfway through that time period.

We had a constructive conversation virtually. The day after our meeting, Blynne created a Google Doc so we could review, edit, and comment together. Our next virtual meeting was scheduled for May 3 to “check-in with others, refine as needed, and discuss next steps,” as Blynne wrote. That meeting was also productive, and we felt comfortable with our results. It was time for others to review.



Blynne presented our results to the dean on May 3. The dean commented in late June and asked Blynne to present to our library's Leadership Team (a group that includes Blynne and our dean) a week later. The group made a couple more suggestions.

Next, Blynne reached out to a person in Student Health Services, “who does a lot of counseling triage,” for his suggestions regarding the final sentence. Blynne kept Miriam and I informed at every step, and we commented as we liked. On June 24, the work was completed.



Students at UWG examine archival resources.



To those formulating harmful content statements, we offer this piece of advice, following general rules of etiquette: keep it simple and direct. People may not read long statements; also, the more that is said, the more the possibility for misinterpretation, disagreement, or conflict to occur.

Ingram Library holds the papers of Tom Murphy, the Speaker of the House in Georgia from 1973 to 2002. His House office is recreated in a room behind the column to the left.

Our results at UWG

Statement on Harmful Content

General; posted on Special Collections website and the Finding Aids site

Some of the materials held in Ingram Library's Special Collections contain images and language that is euphemistic, racist, homophobic, transnegative, sexist, ableist, or that demeans the humanity of people in other ways.

Harmful Content Note

Included in finding aids for specific archival collections

This collection includes materials that contain offensive language and/or images. It is important for Ingram Library's Special Collections to acknowledge that racism and bigotry, including terms considered derogatory and terms that were used historically, are present in this collection. Encountering racist or derogatory content can be difficult and painful. The University of West Georgia offers counseling and other support services for current students, faculty, and staff.



What is Special Collections?

Special Collections in Ingram Library is the repository for primary sources such as archival collections, rare books, and other unique materials at the University of West Georgia. Our significant collecting areas are central and responsive to the research, teaching, and learning priorities at the University of West Georgia and include the University Archives, West Georgia History & Culture, Georgia's Political History and Oral History Program, Humanistic Psychology, and Human Consciousness.

Through collecting and preserving rare, scarce, and valuable materials; through sharing the materials through exhibitions, teaching, programs, and digitization; through creating student-centered spaces and services; through regular engagement with individuals, families, and organizations in the West Georgia region; and through our work partnering with other community archives, Special Collections directly supports and enriches research, teaching, and learning at the University of West Georgia and promotes understanding and scholarship by members of the general public and academic communities.

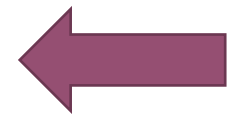
Some of the materials held in Ingram Library's Special Collections contain images and language that is euphemistic, racist, homophobic, transnegative, sexist, ableist, or that demeans the humanity of people in other ways.

The collections are non-circulating and maintained in closed stacks. Security measures include limited access by staff and an electronic security system throughout the department. Exhibits from materials in Special Collections are created by the department and are rotated several times a year.

Acquisitions that do not fall into existing collecting areas sometimes are made in anticipation of new emphases. In addition to scholarly research value, library faculty may also take into account some items' exhibit and/or outreach potential.

Special Collections accepts from other departments of the Ingram Library transfers of materials that require special protection and care. Criteria considered in such transfers include fragility, age, associative value, and market value. These materials are accepted regardless of whether the subject area(s) represented are ones targeted by Special Collections as collecting emphases.

The collections support a wide range of researchers, including undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and other scholars whose work relies on primary resource materials, rare printed material, and manuscripts.



Here is how the general statement appears within an Ingram Library webpage on Special Collections, after the "About Us" and Mission Statement, but before a brief history statement on that webpage.

<https://www.westga.edu/library/special-collections/about-special-collections.php>

Find what you're looking for:

Years: From To



Search

Special Collections

Special Collections in the Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library gathers, preserves, and publicly shares primary sources to advance teaching, learning, scholarship, and community engagement in service to the University of West Georgia (UWG), the regional community, scholars, and members of the general public. At UWG, Special Collections is the repository for primary sources such as archival collections, rare books, and other unique materials.

Some of the materials held in Ingram Library's Special Collections contain images and language that is euphemistic, racist, homophobic, transnegative, sexist, ableist, or that demeans the humanity of people in other ways.

The significant collecting areas of Special Collections are central and responsive to the research, teaching, and learning priorities at the University of West Georgia and include the University Archives, West Georgia Regional History & Culture, Georgia's Political Papers and Oral History Program, and Psychology collections with particularly topical specialities in Humanistic Psychology and Exceptional Human Experiences.

Additionally, Special Collections recognizes and honors other historical organizations and individuals who also gather, preserve, and make public primary source materials. As a partner, Special Collections has a Community Archives program that offers opportunities for community members to tell their stories and to facilitate the preservation of these stories. The Community Archives program helps in the creation and care of archives representative of the people and free of the traditional institutional repository.

Special Collections is free and open to members of the public on Monday-Thursday, from 8:30 a.m. to noon and from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. It is closed to researchers on Friday. Special Collections is located on the ground floor of Ingram Library and can be accessed either using the elevator or taking the marble staircase down from the main lobby.

It is advisable to call ahead to schedule a research visit. Please call (678) 839-5455 or email special@westga.edu for more information.

Here is the general statement again on the landing page for the Encoded Archival Description finding aids at <https://aspace-uwg.galileo.usg.edu/>.

Biographical / Historical

Materials in this collection were created or collected by James Carson Pritchard (1911-1964), and his son, James Warren Pritchard (1939-).

J. Carson Pritchard was a white Baptist clergyman and Director of the "College in the Country" adult education program at West Georgia College. Pritchard Hall, a men's dormitory built on the West Georgia College campus in 1966, demolished around 2004, was named in his honor.

J. Warren Pritchard was...[See more >](#)

Extent

1.26 Linear Feet (3 boxes)

Language

English

Collapse All

Additional Description

Overview

Papers of J. Carson Pritchard, Director of Adult Education at West Georgia College, and the papers of his son, J. Warren Pritchard, psychologist.

Arrangement

Arranged in 3 series: 1. J. Carson Pritchard, 2. J. Warren Pritchard, 3. Extended family

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of J. Warren Pritchard, April 2021

Harmful Content Warning Note

This collection includes materials that contain offensive language and/or images. It is important for Ingram Library's Special Collections to acknowledge that racism and bigotry, including terms considered derogatory and terms that were used historically, are present in this collection. Encountering racist or derogatory language content can be difficult and painful. The University of West Georgia offers counseling and other support services for current students, faculty, and staff.

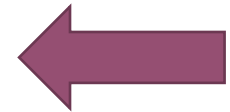
Processing Information

Processed by Blynnie Olivieri, April 2021

Subjects

- [Adult education educators](#)

Here is the specific warning note in the finding aid for the collection with harmful language.
<https://aspace-uwg.galileo.usg.edu/repositories/2/resources/545>






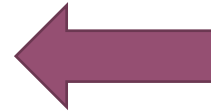
- TOP
- SEND TO
- GET IT
- DETAILS
- LINKS
- EXPLORE

poll taxes in Alabama and got in trouble with his church. Correspondents with [J. Carson Pritchard](#) include: Charles Addams, Robert J. Blakely, John Carr, Mildred English, Julian Harris, Miles Horton, Margaret Long, Elmore McKey, L.E. Roberts, Jay Sheffield, Guy H. Wells. The collection also includes a file of newspaper articles, published in Pickens County Progress newspaper in 2016, which reprinted an account of [J.A. Roberson](#), a Farmers Alliance recruiter, that was originally published as a series in the Carroll County Times in August 1922, about moonshine and moonshining in Pickens County, Georgia. Warren [Pritchard](#) found the 1922 Carroll County Times issues in a home in Carroll County and then shared them with the Pickens County newspaper. [Pritchard](#) guesses that Roberson's experience in Pickens County likely occurred around 1885. Also included in the papers is a photograph of Judith Stogner's maternal grandfather, Seth Williams, and another family member with a string of fish, taken in Waco, Georgia. Papers of [J. Carson Pritchard](#), Director of Adult Education at West Georgia College, and the papers of his son, [J. Warren Pritchard](#), psychologist.

Citing this Collection	J. Carson Pritchard Family Papers, Special Collections, Irvine Sullivan Ingram Library, University of West Georgia.
Access Restrictions	Open to all users; no restrictions.
General Note	This collection includes materials that contain offensive language and/or images. It is important for Ingram Library's Special Collections to acknowledge that racism and bigotry, including terms considered derogatory and terms that were used historically, are present in this collection. Encountering racist or derogatory content can be difficult and painful. The University of West Georgia offers counseling and other support services for current students, faculty, and staff.
Creation Date	1927-2021
Physical Description	1.26 linear ft. (3 boxes).
Arrangement	Arranged in 3 series: 1. J. Carson Pritchard , 2. J. Warren Pritchard , 3. Extended family.
Use and Reproduction	Rights held by the University of West Georgia.
Language	English
Source	01GALI_USG_ALMA
OCLC Number	1249950862
NZ MMS ID	9922400452802931
IZ MMS ID	9913859894702961
Finding Aid	Finding aid available in repository and online.

Links

- [Finding Aid](#)  >
- [This item in WorldCat®](#)  >
- [Technical Display](#)  >
- [Report a Problem](#)
- [Show PNX](#)



Here is how the harmful content statement note within the catalog's bibliographic record for this collection appears to patrons in our instance of Primo.

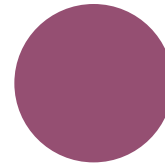
https://galileo-usg-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=01GALI_USG_ALMA71268809850002931&context=L&vid=UWG_V1&lang=en_US&search_scope=UWG&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=default_tab&query=any,contains,j%20carson%20pritchard&offset=0

Next steps

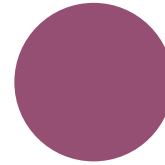
Other actions to be taken

Blynne will provide training for Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) in Special Collections.

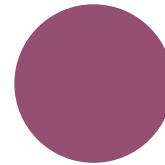
Blynne will provide a Voluntary Self-Description Form, which will represent the person/s who created or collected the materials, not necessarily the donor of the materials. The form will only be used when the person donating the materials is also the creator/collector.



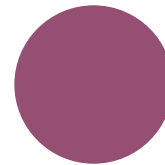
Questions on the Voluntary Self-Description Form:



What few keywords would you use to describe yourself?



Do you give Ingram Library's Special Collections permission to include your self-description in the finding aid (inventory) about the materials, and in other publicly accessible information about, and descriptions of, this collection?



Signature, date

DEI continues to be a welcome topic of discussion for all Library employees and is included in various Library employee meetings. It was a well-attended session during our Library Professional Development Day on July 29.



Harmful content statements at other institutions

Laurier Cress, a graduate student at University of Denver, did a practicum internship at Duke. She has identified 42 institutions with harmful language statements at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wI6ju-sPKfRpXRMLYf7QHtJeP-iOjmRd0jsvRN4cn5k/edit>



<https://rose.library.emory.edu/about/harmful-language.html>



<https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/statement-language-archival-description>



Blogpost by Laurier Cress on March 25, 2021:
<https://blogs.library.duke.edu/bitstreams/2021/03/25/an-interns-investigation-on-decolonizing-archival-descriptions-and-legacy-metadata/>

<https://dp.la/about/harmful-language-statement>

Pros & cons of harmful content statements

Pros

- DEI initiative
- Builds community, both within the library organization in formulating the statement and between the library and the community it serves
- May alleviate harm that users would experience

Cons

- Good chance users will not see the statement, as archives are discovered at the folder level
- Users may not read statements
- Users may find the statements themselves objectionable, either in content or intent



Thank you



I would like to express huge thanks to Blynne Olivieri and Miriam Nauenburg at the University of West Georgia. This presentation is only possible because I learned from them and continue to profit from their wisdom! Blynne also kindly supplied many photos utilized in this slide show.

You may contact me at shelley@westga.edu.



Spoons purported to be bent only with the power of the mind; held in the William G. Roll Papers.

Please ask questions or make comments now. Your music collections may have lyrics and/or sheet music covers or other resources with harmful content, so this topic relates to you. Let's have a good discussion as time permits.

The main entrance to the library. We have a second public entrance through a Starbucks and a back entrance for employees.

