

TAKEN FOR GRANTED: EXAMINING STRUCTURAL PREJUDICE IN A LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY'S ARCHIVES

Objectives

In this poster I will...

- provide context for this poster...
- discuss my findings related to diversity and bias in archival practices...
- demonstrate ways that archival practices can overlook and exclude diverse perspectives...

... in order to confirm the importance of Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) in archives and other institutions for reparative work towards social justice.

Background

I curated a small solo exhibition (Figure 1) entitled “Taken For Granted: The Legacy of a Land Grant University” in the Maryland Room at the University of Maryland College Park’s (UMD) Hornbake Library. The exhibition explored what a Land Grant designation means, how it has changed and the social impacts it has on an institution.

Goals

- Explore the parallels between events that shaped the changing objectives in Land Grant institutions and social inequities.
- Include the stories of marginalized and underrepresented groups in the University’s history.

Scan the QR Code below to read more about the exhibit



Figure 1

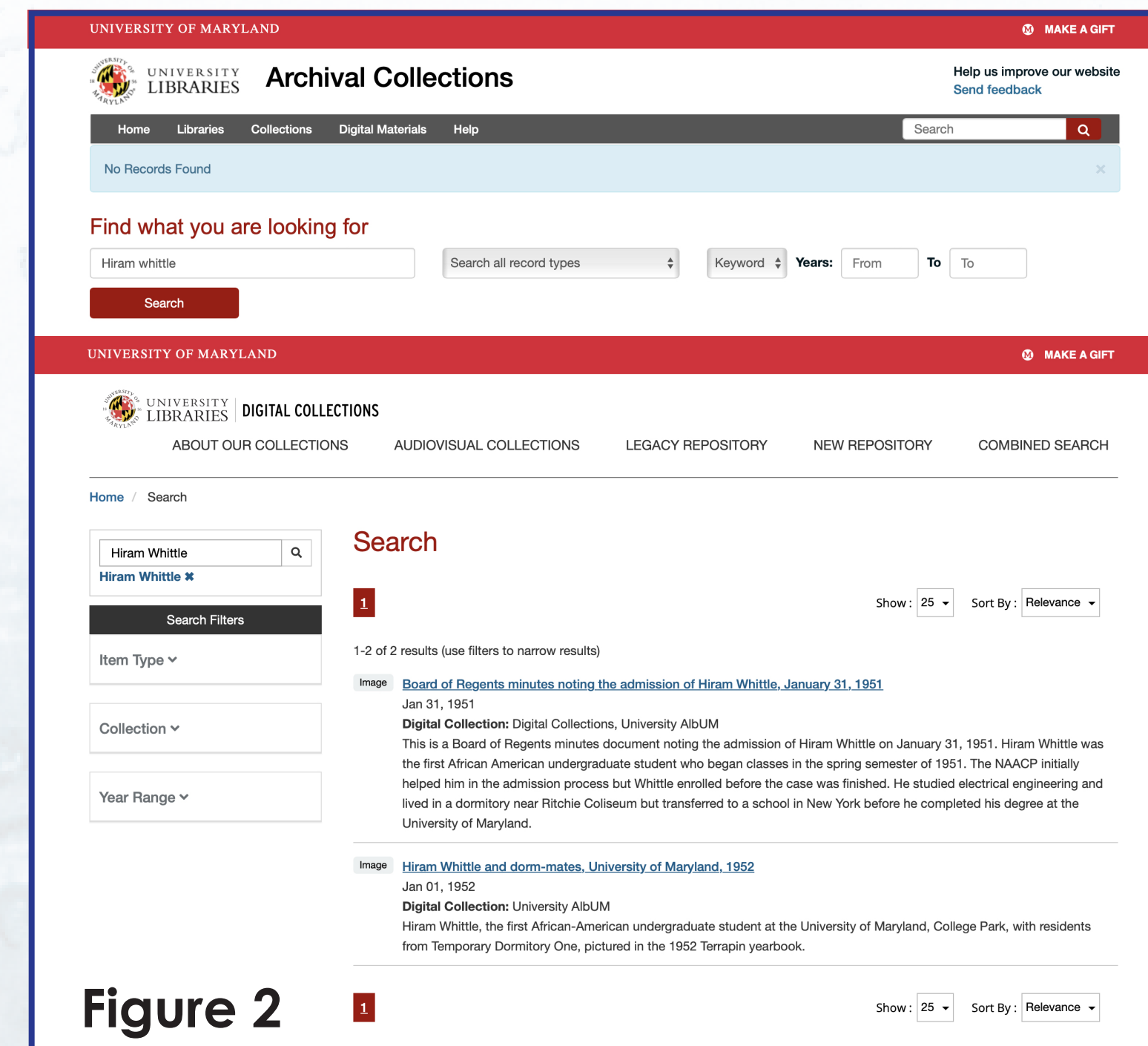


Figure 2

Findings

Diverse narratives outside of the “mythical norm”* are silenced.

- Information about how English nobility became “owners” of Maryland is only represented from the white perspective.
- Hiram Whittle, the first Black man to gain admission to the University of Maryland in 1951, is barely mentioned in the Special Collections and University Archives (Figure 2).

Transparency is lacking regarding University history.

- If there was no Federal land within a State’s borders to endow that State’s Land Grant, “land scrip” in the West was granted instead. Correspondence inquiring about the location of the land scrip that was originally given to the Maryland Agricultural College indicates that the location of the scrip was unknown and undisclosed (Figure 3).
- Very little information regarding financial benefits of Land Grant institutions.

There are residual effects on students outside of the “mythical norm”*.

- Publications from 1954 to 2010 show how underrepresented groups experienced life on campus. Examples include:
 - “15 Men invade U. of M. Home Economics Class”, *The Baltimore Sun*, 1954. Begins with “Face it gals, it’s a man’s world” before launching into misogynistic tropes.
 - “Racism Mars Homecoming”, *The Asian Voice*, 1992. Recounts racist slurs and lewd gestures directed at Asian men and women attending campus Homecoming events.
 - “A call for truth”, *The Diamondback*, 2010. Discusses how a member of the Indigenous community is often asked “dot or feather Indian?” when he discloses his identity.

* Based on some of Audre Lorde’s “mythical norm”: White, male, wealthy, educated and Christian (1990). “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. MIT Press.

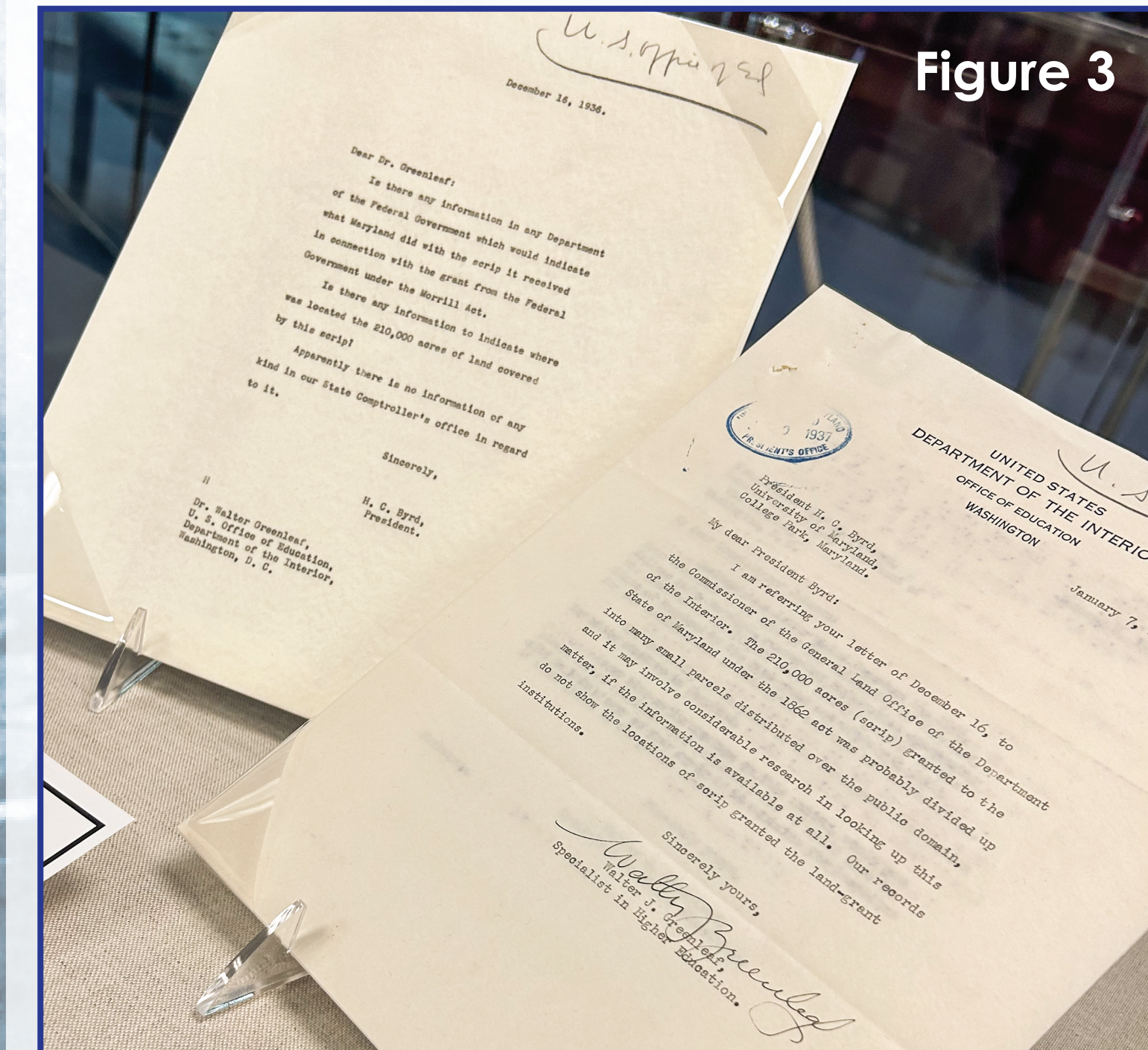


Figure 3

Conclusion

The findings to the left show that diverse communities lack representation in the archives that steward and preserve UMD’s campus history. During the research process, I struggled to find diverse voices in our history and information about our Land Grant designation. Some things archivists could do to increase efforts towards JEDI:

- Revisit Collection Development Policies that promote varied perspectives and narratives.
- Editing finding aids that exclude prominent figures and stories.
- Increase transparency regarding University history, such as University leadership and their policies.
- Consciously editing descriptions of materials that may contain harsh/racist language to make them more accessible to diverse audiences.
- Create community archives initiatives with diverse local groups