

Recommendations for (Re)Describing Japanese American Archival Collections

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Problem

How can archives begin to address and remedy description issues involving WWII Japanese American incarceration collections and materials?

Memories have been plagued with incorrect and euphemistic terms and this language can negatively influence the effectiveness of researchers finding materials and downplays the racism and cruelty of incarceration.

Process

Literature Review

Researching language recommendations from Japanese American associations and archival redescription projects

Interviews

Interviewing academics and community members for terminology guidelines

Recommendations

Drafting guidelines for archives



Minidoka Concentration Camp c. 1943
(Courtesy of Densho)

Example Recommendations

- Eliminate euphemistic language or put them in quotations marks
- Properly use terminology like internment and incarceration
- Redescription process should be more than a simple “find and replace”
- Preserve older versions of finding aids for transparency
- Include explanation of why description was updated