Traumatic Materials Statement:

Civil War and Slavery Collection (RHC-45)

For GVSU Special Collections and University Archives, November 2023

Researchers using the Civil War and Slavery collection may encounter harmful, offensive, or triggering content, including but not limited to racist language, descriptions, and imagery. Please exercise caution while viewing these materials and address concerns with an archivist should any arise.

We acknowledge that material in our collections are representative of the power imbalances inherent to archival institutions. Archives are inextricably linked to Euro-American cultural history and systemic racism. Historically, documentation has been used to control, erase, and decontextualize the cultures, stories, and identities of Black people. Furthermore, we acknowledge that historical documentation contained within the archives derives from these oppressive practices. Our collections are reflective of systemic issues within our society, including oppression, white supremacy, and institutional racism. However, we continue to preserve this documentation for the historical record and to provide impacted communities with access to their histories. We seek to make our slavery-related materials accessible for research with appropriate context and content warnings.

While we work to reduce the harmful impacts of traumatic materials in our archives, we strive to balance the preservation of history with sensitivity to how these materials are presented and used in our physical and digital spaces. At Grand Valley State University Special Collections and University Archives, we adhere to the current best practices for descriptive metadata as outlined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the American Library Association (ALA). There may be harmful and/or offensive language in archival descriptions and finding aids because descriptive search terms and standards are based on established systems that often perpetuate forms of oppression and prejudice. We commit to reviewing and updating outdated, offensive, and/or harmful language whenever possible in accordance with local and national descriptive standards.

If you have questions or concerns about potentially harmful content in our collections, please contact us at: collections@gvsu.edu.