

# Illegal Searching: Solutions to Problematic Subject Headings

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
SUBJECT  
HEADINGS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
SUBJECT  
HEADINGS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
SUBJECT  
HEADINGS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
SUBJECT  
HEADINGS

2002  
15TH EDITION  
IV  
N-R

2002  
15TH EDITION  
III  
I-M

2002  
15TH EDITION  
II  
D-H

2002  
15TH EDITION  
I  
A-C

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
SUBJECT  
HEADINGS

25TH EDITION

2002

V  
S-Z

Justina Kaiser  
Digital Discovery Librarian  
Miami University Oxford

# Overview



“Library classifications are constructed on the basis of universalized norms, and subjects that deviate from certain assumed norms are marked as “special” or “other.” In many cases, these were originally defined as abnormal, deviant, or defective.” Adler, M., Huber, J. T., & Nix, A. T.

# So...why does this matter?

## Normalizing race...

---

1. <a href="#">Illegal aliens</a>	LC Subject Headings (LCSH)	Topic	sh85003553
Aliens--Legal status, laws, etc ; Aliens, Illegal ; Illegal aliens--Legal status, laws, etc ; Illegal immigrants ; Illegal immigration ; Undocumented aliens ; Aliens, Illegal			

## Normalizing sexuality...

---

2. <a href="#">Sexual minorities</a>	LC Subject Headings (LCSH)	Topic	sh2004003385
Gender minorities ; GLBT people ; GLBTQ people ; Lesbigan people ; LBG people ; LGBT people ; LGBTQ people ; Non-heterosexual people ; Non-heterosexuals ; Sexual dissidents			



# So...why does this matter?

The issue, of course, is with how we determine *people*.

People with disabilities

LC Subject Headings (LCSH) Topic

sh85058663

Cripples ; Disabled ; Disabled people ; Disabled persons ; Handicapped ; Handicapped people ; Individuals with disabilities ; People with physical disabilities ; Persons with disabilities ; Physically challenged people

This distinguishes a person with disabilities as a *person* first. Which is optimal.

Adler, M., Huber, J. T., & Nix, A. T. (2017). Stigmatizing Disability: Library Classifications and the Marking and Marginalization of Books about People with Disabilities. *Library Quarterly*, 87(2), 117–135. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690734>

# So...why does this matter?

When we compare how we talk about simply white vs. black people, according to LCSH, we see a drastic dissonance.

Children, Black, in literature

LC Subject Headings  
(LCSH)

Topic

sh97004446

GO

RESET

Results: 1-0 of 0

< 1 >

**Label**

**Vocabulary**

**Concept**

**Subdivision**

**Identifier**

Results: 1-0 of 0

< 1 >

# So...why does this matter?

For the purposes of Miami, we want to discuss indigenous peoples.

Fortunately, Native Americans is only an unsubstantiated Topic, but...

1. Native American . .	LC Subject Headings (LCSH)	Topic	sh93007330
------------------------	-------------------------------	-------	------------

“Indians” still refers to those native to the North American continent. Note, also, that a variant heading is “Pre-Columbian Indians.”

1. Indians	LC Subject Headings (LCSH)	Topic	sh85065022
------------	----------------------------	-------	------------

Aborigines, American ; American aborigines ; American Indians ; Amerindians ; Amerinds ; Indians--Civilization ; Pre-Columbian Indians ; Precolumbian Indians ; Indians--Civilization

# Current solutions

Since (and likely before) Dartmouth students and librarians expressed their distaste in the term *illegal aliens*, individuals have been working to find solutions.

However:

- Local solutions aren't national, nor global;
- They require manpower that often isn't budgeted; and
- Encompassing all of the problems currently facing our resources is difficult at best, inexcusable always, and impossible.

# Current solutions

Localized solutions also neglect the international view of the Library of Congress.

The headings they output represent American library thoughts and ideals. They are a standard that we cannot ignore. If one institution agrees to use a derogatory or dehumanizing term, and we, as other institutions, agree out of necessity, we agree that this is a viewpoint we have.



# Solutions

Actionable solutions are preferred!

- Creating alternative headings in catalogs
- Protesting unjust/unfair headings
- Remaining unbiased while respecting whom we're representing

# Solutions

Miami University works closely with the Myaamia Tribe, from whom we took land.

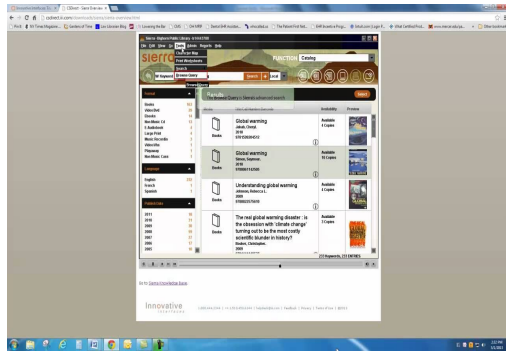
Adding headings that adhere to First Nations as alternative headings will assist with the spread of misinformation...

...while keeping information accessible to everyone!

# Solutions: Remapping Data

Miami uses Sierra, a III product. The catalog becomes discoverable via EBSCO Discovery Services.

The goal:



Indians -> Indigenous peoples

- Coding changes outside of Sierra
- Articulating to patrons that these changes have occurred

# Future concerns

## Transparency?

- How will users recognize the changes?
- Does making sensitive subject headings invisible affect users?

## Maintenance?

- “Politically correct” - How do we help users understand the reasons for the changes?
- We can't become submissive in our pursuits for nationwide change just because of our own fixes.

## Understanding?

- How do universities that have a majority of leaders in white, straight, male, cisgender positions request help from marginalized individuals without overburdening them, or marginalizing them due to their minority status?

# Thoughts?

This is a big topic, and has been for the last few years. A few questions for you:

- What is your university or institution doing to progress equal and normative representation in cataloging?
- What can people outside of the libraries or institutions offer to help?
- How can we advocate these changes to students and users?

Justina Kaiser

[kaiserj5@miamioh.edu](mailto:kaiserj5@miamioh.edu)

tel:+15135291776

# Further reading:

*'Change the Subject': A Hard-Fought Battle Over Words.* (2021, October 11). Dartmouth.  
<https://home.dartmouth.edu/news/2019/04/change-subject-hard-fought-battle-over-words>

Adler, M., Huber, J. T., & Nix, A. T. (2017). Stigmatizing Disability: Library Classifications and the Marking and Marginalization of Books about People with Disabilities. *Library Quarterly*, 87(2), 117–135. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690734>