



# Words Matter: Harmful Language and U.S. Government Information

Melanie Polutta  
Cataloging Policy Specialist,  
Library of Congress  
[mpol@loc.gov](mailto:mpol@loc.gov)

Susanne Caro  
Government Information Librarian,  
New Mexico State Library  
[Susanne.caro@dca.nm.us](mailto:Susanne.caro@dca.nm.us)

Jennifer Morgan  
Government Information Librarian,  
Maurer School of Law,  
Indiana University  
[jlbryan@indiana.edu](mailto:jlbryan@indiana.edu)



Overview

Legal and Historical Language / Working with Users

Proposing Changes



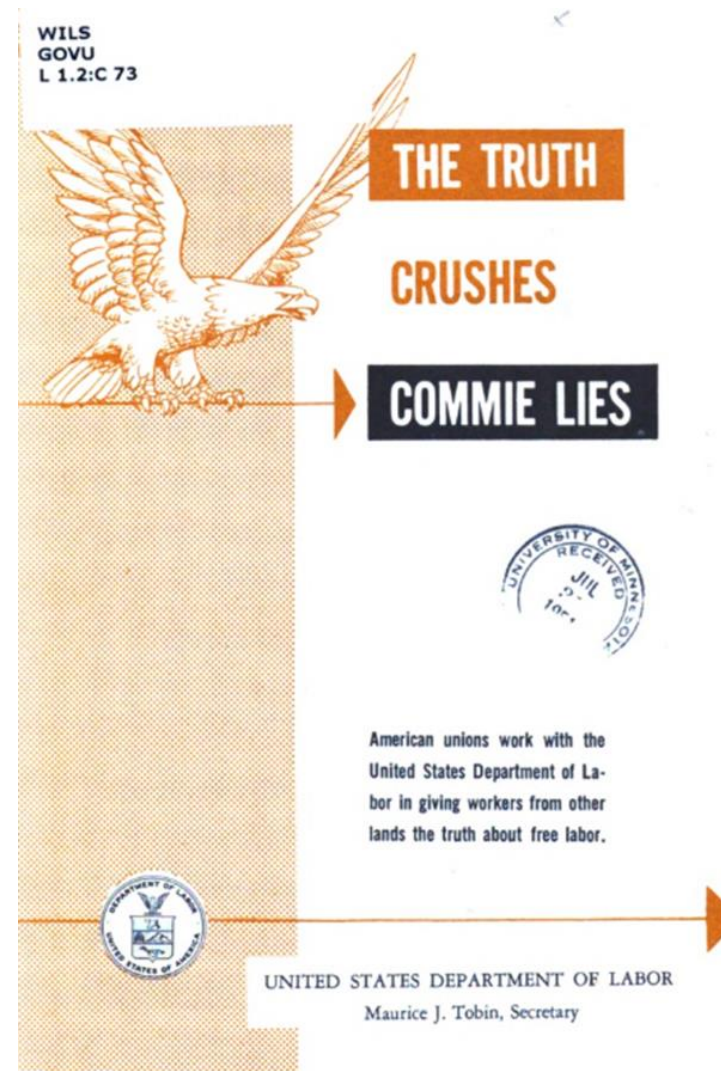
# Overview

Susanne Caro, Government Information Librarian,  
New Mexico State Library



# Marginalization

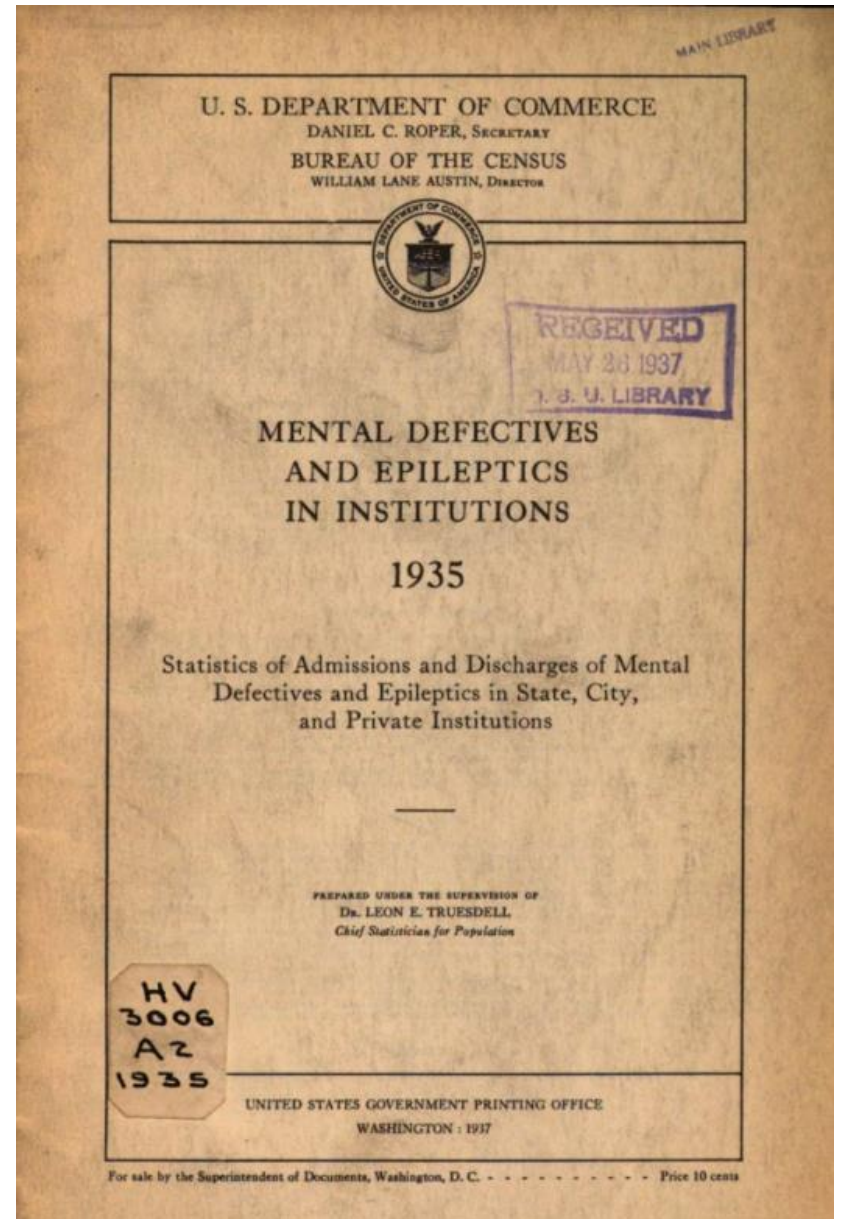
- Health (medical/ paternalism)
- Race (othering/belittling/ ignorant)
- Political (intentional)
- Economic
- Incarcerated
- Ignorant





# Throughout gov publications

- Census
- Congressional Documents
- Department of Health
- Department of Education
- Department of Defense
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Maps

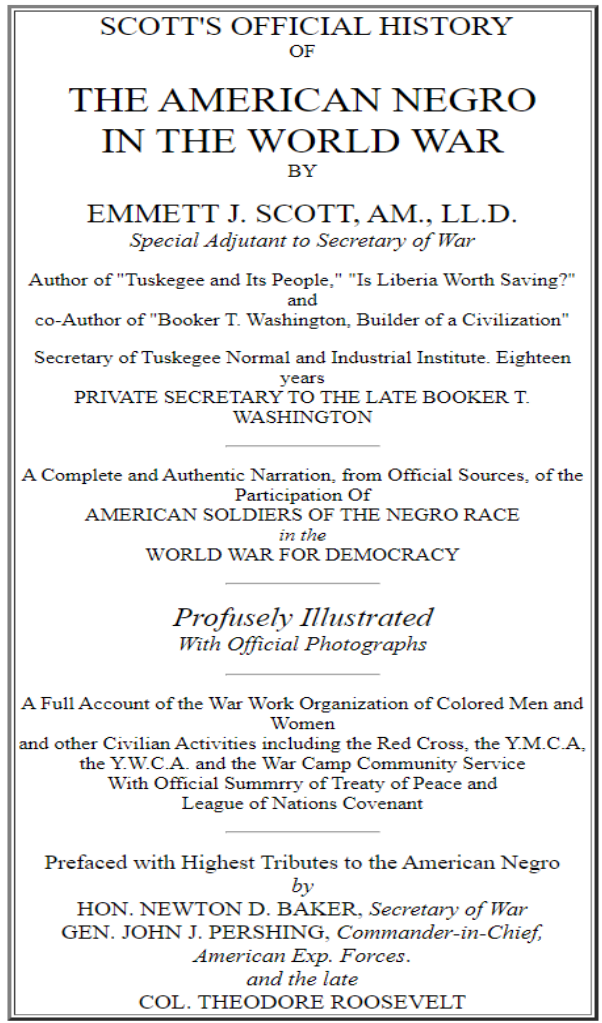




# Evolving language- it doesn't mean that anymore

- Acceptable\* >> slur >> new term >> slur >> new term
- Uncomfortable terms- Primary sources
- Spelling: Navaho? Navajo? Dine?
- Modern language in metadata
- Listening to those affected
- Change can take time

\*Acceptable to the people using the term which may or may not relate to them





USE African American sociologists  
Negro soldiers  
USE African American soldiers  
Soldiers, Black

260 ##\$a[Washington :\$bWar Dept.],\$cc1919.  
300 ##\$a511, [1] p., [96] p. of plates :\$bill., facsim., maps, ports. ;\$c24 cm.  
599 ##\$amf/dl  
650 #0\$aWorld War, 1914-1918\$xAfrican Americans.\$0(uri)  
<http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh2010119458>\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh2010119458\$9Y  
650 #0\$aAfrican American soldiers.\$0(uri)  
<http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85001906>\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9Y  
650 #0\$aAfrican American military personnel\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9N  
650 #0\$wnne\$aAfro-American soldiers\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9N  
650 #0\$wnne\$aNegro soldiers\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9N  
650 #0\$wnne\$aNegroes as soldiers\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9N  
650 #0\$aSoldiers, African American\$2LCSH\$041-LIBRARY\_OF\_CONGRESS-sh85001906\$9N  
730 0#\$aOfficial history of the American Negro in the World War.  
852 0#\$bSPEC COLL\$822465413450003843





Fall 2023  
Federal Depository Library  
Conference

October 16-18 • Virtual • #FDLConference



# Legal and Historical Language, Working with Users

Jennifer Morgan, Government Information Librarian,  
Maurer School of Law, Indiana University





# “Illegal Aliens”: Multiple Problems

- November 12, 2021, the Policy and Standards Division (PSD) of the Library of Congress (LC), announces decision to replace the terms “Aliens” and “Illegal aliens” with new subject headings “Noncitizens” and “Illegal immigration”
- *“We're constantly reviewing subject headings as language changes, to make sure that we're keeping current with the language that researchers are using.”*  
(Library of Congress)
- **2014:** Students and librarians at Dartmouth submit a formal request that LC revise the heading “Illegal aliens” to “Undocumented immigrants.”
  - **Dec. 2014:** LC doesn't approve the request for two reasons: (1) “Undocumented immigrant” is not directly synonymous with “Illegal alien,” and not all undocumented people are or intend to be immigrants; (2) authoritative sources for legal terminology generally use “Illegal aliens” as their established term.
- **Jan. 2016:** ALA Council adopts resolution & calls on LC to change the heading “Illegal aliens to Undocumented immigrants”
- **March 2016,** LC convenes stakeholder meeting to examine the problem. Instead of “Undocumented immigrants,” LC determines that the “Aliens” heading will be revised to “Noncitizens,” and for “Illegal aliens,” the heading used will be “Unauthorized immigration.”



# Political Backlash

To the extent practicable, the Committee instructs the Library to maintain certain subject headings that reflect terminology used in title 8, United States Code.

114TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

## H. R. 4926

To direct the Librarian of Congress to retain the headings “Aliens” and “Illegal aliens” in the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

---

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 13, 2016

Mrs. BLACK (for herself, Mr. GOHMERT, Mr. BRAT, Mr. BARLETTA, Mr. KING of Iowa, Mr. CALVERT, Mr. BROOKS of Alabama, Mr. FLEMING, Mr. SMITH of Texas, Mr. ROHRBACHER, Mr. LOUDERMILK, Mr. FLEISCHMANN, Mr. RATCLIFFE, Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina, Mr. PITTSINGER, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. ROE of Tennessee, Mr. BABIN, Mr. GOSAR, Mr. BOUSTANY, and Mr. TURNER) introduced the following bill, which was referred to the Committee on House Administration

---

### A BILL

To direct the Librarian of Congress to retain the headings “Aliens” and “Illegal aliens” in the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*  
 3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**  
 4 This Act may be cited as the “Stopping Partisan Pol-  
 5 icy at the Library of Congress Act”.

114TH CONGRESS } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES { REPORT  
2d Session } { 114-594

---

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2017

MAY 25, 2016.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. GRAVES of Georgia, from the Committee on Appropriations, submitted the following

### REPORT

together with

### MINORITY VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 5325]

The Committee on Appropriations submits the following report in explanation of the accompanying bill making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017, and for other purposes.

INDEX TO BILL AND REPORT

	Page number	Bill	Report
Highlights of Bill .....	2	2	
Title I—Legislative Branch Appropriations .....	2	3	
House of Representatives .....	2	3	
Joint Items:			
Joint Economic Committee .....	11	6	
Joint Committee on Taxation .....	11	7	
Office of the Attending Physician .....	12	7	
Office of Congressional Accessibility Services .....	13	7	
Capitol Police .....	13	8	
Office of Compliance .....	15	9	
Congressional Budget Office .....	15	9	
Architect of the Capitol (except Senate Office Buildings) .....	16	9	
Library of Congress .....	25	15	
Government Publishing Office .....	33	19	
Government Accountability Office .....	37	20	
Open World Leadership Center Trust Fund .....	38	21	

20-162

## MINORITY VIEWS OF NITA LOWEY AND DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ

In addition to inadequate funding priorities, this bill wades unnecessarily into the Nation’s immigration debate by including report language that seeks to influence the Library of Congress to continue to use the term “Illegal Alien” in its subject headings. Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz had an amendment to remove the contentious language that failed on a close vote of 24–25.

Subject headings serve as the mechanism for how the Library catalogs or groups information—something the Library of Congress is well positioned to understand. They use headings that reflect current day uses of words and phrases so information is easily accessible by its users. There was a time when the Library used the subject heading “Insanity;” today it uses “Mental Illness.” The Library once had the subject heading “Negro,” then moved to “Afro American,” and now uses “African American.” In March 2016, the Library found that the term “Illegal Aliens” had become pejorative and decided to use the terms “Noncitizen” and “Unauthorized Immigration.”

Four Republicans joined with the Democrats to strip this language from the report. While the amendment did not pass, it showed there is bipartisan support to reduce the political rhetoric surrounding immigration and to allow the Library of Congress to remain free of political influence.

While we appreciate increases to areas such as the Copyright Office and the Historic Buildings Revitalization Trust Fund, we remain disappointed by the inclusion of the report language on “Illegal Aliens.” As this bill continues, we stand ready to work with the majority to remove partisan obstacles and return the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill to a bipartisan endeavor with the goal of better serving our constituents and passing legislation for the good of the American people.



# Current Legal Language: “Aliens”

## United States Code

- **Title 8, “Aliens and Nationality”**
- 8 USC § 1101(a)(3) The term "alien" means any person not a citizen or national of the United States.
- “Illegal alien” (e.g., 6 USC § 240, 8 USC § 1365, 8 USC § 1611, etc.)

## Code of Federal Regulations

- **Title 8, “Aliens and Nationality”**
- “Illegal alien” (e.g., 13 CFR § 109.400, 13 CFR § 123.702, 29 CFR § 20, 29 CFR § 500.140)
  - 29 CFR § 500.20(n) Illegal alien means any person who is not lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States or who has not been authorized by the Attorney General to accept employment in the United States.

8 USC 1365: Reimbursement of States for costs of incarcerating illegal aliens and certain Cuban nationals

Text contains those laws in effect on October 2, 2023

**From Title 8-ALIENS AND NATIONALITY**

CHAPTER 12-IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY

SUBCHAPTER II-IMMIGRATION

Part IX-Miscellaneous

**Jump To:**

[Source Credit](#)

[Miscellaneous](#)

[Codification](#)

[Regulations](#)

**§1365. Reimbursement of States for costs of incarcerating illegal aliens and certain Cuban nationals**

**(a) Reimbursement of States**

Subject to the amounts provided in advance in appropriation Acts, the Attorney General shall reimburse a State for the costs incurred by the State for the imprisonment of any **illegal alien** or Cuban national who is convicted of a felony by such State.

**(b) Illegal aliens convicted of a felony**

An **illegal alien** referred to in subsection (a) is any alien who is any alien convicted of a felony who is in the United States unlawfully and-

- (1) whose most recent entry into the United States was without inspection, or
- (2) whose most recent admission to the United States was as a nonimmigrant and-
  - (A) whose period of authorized stay as a nonimmigrant expired, or
  - (B) whose unlawful status was known to the Government,

before the date of the commission of the crime for which the alien is convicted.





# Efforts to Modernize Statutory Language

## Correcting Hurtful and Alienating Names in Government Expression (CHANGE) Act

- 2015, 2019, & 2021, Rep. Joaquin Castro [D-TX 20] introduced legislation to remove offensive and inflammatory language characterizing immigrants as "aliens" from federal law ([H.R. 3785, 114th Cong.](#), [H.R.3776, 116th Cong.](#), & [H.R. 457, 117th Cong.](#))

## Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2022, [H.R. 7585, 117th Cong.](#) and [S. 4486, 117th Cong.](#)

- TITLE X—Addressing Social Determinants and Improving Environmental Justice
  - Sec. 10009. Correcting Hurtful and Alienating Names in Government Expression (CHANGE).

## 21st Century Language Act of 2012, [S. 2367, 112th. Cong. \(2012\)](#), became Pub. L. No. 112-231

- SEC. 2. Modernization of Language Referring to Persons Who Are Mentally Ill
- Removed references to the word "lunatic" from several sections the U.S. Code.

158 Cong. Rec. H6656 (daily ed. Dec. 5, 2012).

In the past, Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have worked together to address similar terms in the Code which negatively describe individuals with mental health issues. For example, in 2010, Rosa's Law passed in Congress with bipartisan support and was later signed into law. The law replaced parts of the Code containing the phrase "having mental retardation" with the phrase "having intellectual disabilities."

The term "lunatic" holds a place in antiquity and should no longer have a prominent place in our U.S. Code. Although the bill does not replace the word with another term, it follows the precedence of Congress to study semantics and continuously improves the status and appropriateness of our Nation's laws by addressing pejorative terms.








# Legal Finding Aids: Controlled Vocabulary

**West Key Number System:** classification system that indexes cases by topics and specific legal issues

## 24 778 Harboring or concealing alien

- Topic number 24: “Aliens, Immigration, and Citizenship”
  - Key Number 778: “Harboring or concealing alien”

6	<b>Aliens, Immigration, and Citizenship</b>		24	Aliens, Immigration, and Citizenship
	Terms “conceal,” “harbor,” and “shield from detection” have independent meanings, and thus a conviction of concealing, harboring and shielding <b>illegal aliens</b> for commercial advantage can result from committing, or attempting to commit, any one of the three acts. Immigration and Nationality Act, § 274(a)(1)(A)(iii), (a)(1)(A)(v)(II), 8 U.S.C.A. § 1324(a)(1)(A)(iii), (a)(1)(A)(v)(II).		24X	Offenses, Penalties and Prosecutions
			24k774	Facilitating Unlawful Entry or Unlawful Presence
			24k778	Harboring or concealing alien



# Controlled Vocabulary in Commercial Databases

ProQuest<sup>®</sup> Congressional

Related Databases ▾ ⓘ

### Title Info

Hearing Id: H52-20230713-236549  
 Title: [The Consequences of Criminal Aliens on U.S. Communities]  
 Hearing Date: Jul. 13, 2023  
 Committee: Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement. Committee on the Judiciary. House  
 Permalink: <https://congressional-proquest-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.h52-20230713-236549?accountid=11620>

### Congress Session

118-1

### Links to

Retrieve Available Transcripts: [Retrieve selected transcripts](#)

### Summary

Hearing before the *Subcom on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement* to examine enforcement issues and deficiencies, focusing on public safety concerns related to criminal associated transnational criminal organizations.

### Subjects

Immigration; Law enforcement; Criminals; Noncitizens; Organized crime; International cr

### Witnesses

ROSENBERG, Donald - President, Advocates for Victims of Illegal Alien Crime



## The Consequences of Criminal Aliens on U.S. Communities

Hearing  
 Date: Thu, 07/13/2023 - 3:00 PM  
 Location: 2141 Rayburn House Office Building



The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement will hold a hearing on Thursday, July 13, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. ET. The hearing, "The Consequences of Criminal Aliens on U.S. Communities," will examine sanctuary cities that shield illegal aliens at the expense of American taxpayers and the Biden Administration's lax policies that allow criminal aliens to remain in the United States indefinitely. The hearing also will examine how drug cartels and gangs exploit radical open-borders policies and U.S. immigration law to terrorize communities, harm Americans, and burglarize homes and businesses across the country.

ProQuest<sup>®</sup> Legislative Insight

[Back to Results](#) < 1 of 6 >

### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Download PDF Cite / Export

## Relocation Assistance to Illegal Aliens Prohibition Act

### SUMMARY

Legislative History of: PL105-117 [PL105-117 - Legislative History PDF](#)  
 Title: Relocation Assistance to Illegal Aliens Prohibition Act  
 Date: Nov. 21, 1997 Congress Session: 105-1  
 Enacted Bill: [105 S. 1258 - Relocation Assistance to Illegal Aliens Prohibition Act \(Enacted\)](#)  
 Statute at Large: 111 Stat. 2384  
 Public Law: PL105-117 [PL105-117 - Full Text PDF](#)  
 USCS: 42 USCS § 4605,42 USCS § 4633  
 Summary: To amend the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 to prohibit an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States from receiving assistance under that Act.  
 Amended Acts: [Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970](#)

### Subjects

Aliens; Eminent domain; Public works; Relocation

Permalink: [https://li.proquest.com/legislativeinsight/docview?id=PL105-117&type=LEG\\_HIST&accountid=11620](https://li.proquest.com/legislativeinsight/docview?id=PL105-117&type=LEG_HIST&accountid=11620)







# Historical Newspapers

**Readex**  
A Division of NewsBank

America's Historical Newspapers

Help [How to use this database](#) [Change Databases](#) [Share Feedback](#)

Home **Advanced Search** Browse Publications My Folder ▼

Searching 15 of 15 databases ▼

and ▼

and ▼

Add a row... Remove a row...

Sort by

- Full Text
- Headline
- Publication
- Date
- Citation Text
- All Text
- Place of Publication

Limit by

Custom Date —

Custom Date Range ?

From  To

**Negro Suffrage.**

In taking the question upon the extension of suffrage to negroes in Washington, the *Star* says, "At every polling place the best known and most decided Republicans in the city voted an open ticket against negro suffrage, thus proclaiming that, like their fellow Republicans in Connecticut, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa and elsewhere, while willing to grant the negro every right due him before the law, they are not prepared to make a farce of the right of suffrage, by giving it to an ignorant mass of negroes."

*Barnstable Patriot* (1866) 2 Jan, p. 2, (online NewsBank).

## Another Constitutional Amendment.

It is generally believed at Washington, that the proposed amendment to the Constitution, basing representation in Congress upon legal voters, will pass both Houses at an early day. The President advocates its passage, all the Western States will gain representatives by it, and it will, doubtless, lead ultimately to giving the rights of suffrage to the blacks at the South. Indeed it is highly probable that it will lead at no distant day to universal suffrage. We do not believe there is any thing to fear from the extension of suffrage; so far as it has been already extended it has worked well.— It gives a degree of self-respect to those exercising it, and gives them an interest in the stability of the government. We believe that the poorest classes use a vote as wisely as the rich, and that where ignorance causes them to vote wrong, selfishness quite as frequently causes the rich, the educated and the influential classes to cast their ballots against the best interests of the country.





# Working with Library Users

Supporting users and researchers on sensitive topics

1. Explain Historical Context
2. Acknowledge Discomfort with Offensive Language
3. Highlight Educational Purpose
4. Encourage Critical Analysis
5. Promote Respect



*Fall 2023  
Federal Depository Library  
Conference*

October 16-18 • Virtual • #FDLConference



# Proposing Changes

Melanie Polutta, Cataloging Policy Specialist,  
Library of Congress



# Making proposals

LCSH, LCDGT, LCGFT, LCMPT

LCC



# Who makes proposals?

- Library of Congress catalogers
  - This includes everyone at LC
- SACO catalogers (Subject Authority Cooperative Program)
- Anyone
  
- Overview of the process for non-librarians
  - <https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/lcsh-process.html>





# Why make proposals?

- New concepts
- Updated an existing heading/Used For/Broader Terms, etc.



# When to make proposals?

- As part of cataloging process
  - We do not *anticipate* topics
- Special projects
  - <https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/Evaluation-Headings-Indigenous-Peoples.pdf>



# Where to make proposals?

- LC & SACO catalogers: Classification Web Proposal System  
<https://classweb.org>
- Everyone else: web form at  
<https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcshproposalformnew.pdf>





# How do you make proposals?

- Not going to cover the technical aspect here



# Proposing a new or changed heading

1. Search the existing headings
2. Research the topic
3. Formulate the heading, references, etc.
4. Input the proposal into the system
5. Inform Policy, Training, and Cooperative Programs Division  
(at [policy@loc.gov](mailto:policy@loc.gov) for non-SACO people)



# Reviewing a new or changed heading

1. Publish the proposal on a tentative list
2. Gather the comments on any and all proposals
3. PTCP analyzes the proposals according to the established principles of LCSH and makes the decision about each proposal
4. Publish the Summary of Decisions,  
<https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsosed/cpsoeditorial.html>
5. Publish the approved lists, <https://classweb.org/approved-subjects/>





# Proposing a new heading: the beginning

- *History of the Chawai of North-Central Nigeria to 1932*
  - Book about a specific ethnic group which does not yet exist in LCSH, confirmed by searching the database
  - Why doesn't it exist? No one has needed the heading.



# Proposing a new heading: research

- Work cat: History of the Chawai of North-Central Nigeria to 1932, 2002: \$b page 4 of cover (The book is titled, History of the Chawai of North-Central Nigeria, to 1932; using Chawai, which is the name with which we are called in the Hausa language. This name has become the most widely known, and without it many readers will not readily see that this book is about our history. But, as the book has brought out clearly, we call ourselves the Atsam, and our land, the Yinatsam, and our ruler, the Restsam. For the sake of cultural and historical authenticity, beyond the title, and in special cases, it is these names, which we use in our own language, which are used in this study.)



# Proposing a new heading: research

- 670 \$a Ethnologue, 2022 \$b (Atsam, a language of Nigeria; cch; Alt. names: Cawai, Cawe, Cawi, Chawai, Chawe, Chawi; Location: Kaduna state: Kauru LGA; Classification: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Kainji, Eastern, Piti-Atsam)
- 670 \$a African ethnonyms and toponyms, 1984 \$b (Chawai; UF Chawe, Chawi, Atsam; Nigeria)
- 675 \$a African ethnonyms, 1996





# Proposing a new heading: create the heading

## Heading

Atsam (African people)

## Broader term

Ethnology—Nigeria

## Cross-references

Cawai (African people)

Cawe (African people)

Cawi (African people)

Chawai (African people)

Chawe (African people)

Chawi (Nigerian people)



# Research

- *Subject Headings Manual H 202*  
<https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeSHM/H0202.pdf>
- Purposes
  - What work triggered the proposal?
  - What is the definition of the term?
  - What variant terms did you find? What term is preferred? Is it clearly understood?
  - Where should it exist within the hierarchy?
- How much research do you do? It varies.



# Research

- What is literary warrant? Why do we use it?
  - “Justification for the representation of a concept in an indexing language or for the selection of a preferred term because of its frequent occurrence in the literature.”
    - *Guidelines for the Construction, Format, and Management of Monolingual Controlled Vocabularies Z39.19-2005 (R2010)*
- What is authoritative?
  - Dictionaries, encyclopedias, general indexes and thesauri, titles in the LC database, work being cataloged and its bibliography, topical reference sources (especially those within a discipline), websites (for example of related organizations)
  - <https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/indigenous.html> – Interim guidelines for work on indigenous headings





*Fall 2023  
Federal Depository Library  
Conference*

October 16-18 • Virtual • #FDLConference



# Questions and Discussion



# Resources

- [GPO Statement on Outdated and Offensive Language](#)
- [GPO Cataloging & Indexing](#)
- [Library of Congress Evaluation of Headings for Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Subject Headings for Indigenous peoples \(interim guidelines\)](#)
- [Redressing Relationships with the Historically Marginalized/ Redresser les relations avec les personnes historiquement marginalisées](#)
- Corbett Jenny. 1996. *Bad-Mouthing : The Language of Special Needs*. London: Falmer Press.
- [The Word “Negro”](#), U.S. Census, 2010



# Resources

- [“ALA Welcomes Removal of Offensive ‘Illegal aliens’ Subject Headings,”](#) (November 12, 2021).
- [Change the Subject](#) (2019), documentary film about a group of Dartmouth students who challenged anti-immigrant language in the Library of Congress subject headings.
- [SACO: Summary of Decisions, Editorial Meeting Number 2111.](#)
- [Search Terms Up for Debate: The Politics and Purpose of Library Subject Headings](#)
- [Integrating Content on American Indian Law and Indigenous Identities](#), RWU School of Law Integrating Doctrine and Diversity Series Oct. 19, 2022