Don't Class Me in Antiquities!
Giving Voice to Native American Materials

Kelly Webster and Ann Doyle

Introduction

Kelly Webster, Monographs Cataloger at the O'Neill Library at Boston College, and Ann Doyle, Branch Librarian for Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning, share a conversation about some of the issues related to the cataloging and classification of American Indian materials, and give an overview of some alternative practices.

KW: Have you ever noticed how American Indians are treated in Library of Congress cataloging? In both obvious and subtle ways, American Indians are treated as a remnant of the past. Although there have been some positive changes recently, such as the efforts being made to work with tribes to establish the preferred form of tribal names, there is still bias and problematic treatment of Native topics in the Library of Congress classification schedules and subject headings. The E schedules in LC classification are a dumping ground for all things Indian. Medicine, education, psychology? You won't find material on those topics in the R, L or BF schedules if it involves Native Americans, because historic practice segregated us into a historic people. We are still here, though, and people working in library services to Native peoples are finding established practice a barrier to information access and promoting use of the library.

AD: We face similar issues here in Canada. Cataloging practices not only fail to provide access for Aboriginal students and others using the academic libraries, they obscure an increasingly rich interdisciplinary literature and constitute a significant barrier to use of the public libraries. Years ago, as a library school student in 1980, I did a collection analysis of three special collections of Aboriginal materials. It turned out that although the local public library was comparatively well-stocked, the Aboriginal staff at the neighborhood Native Resource Center still felt that it was a poor collection. At the time, the bricks and mortar of this barrier to the public library collection were not clear to me. In retrospect, I see that the lack of appropriate description and classification were significant blocks to access for Aboriginal people. The student paper concluded with the Guidelines...
for the Evaluation and Selection of Indian Materials for Adults from the ALA Adult Services Division Subcommittee on Indian Materials. Those criteria written in 1971 still hold true today!

The guidelines included questions such as, "Are the contributions of American Indian culture to Western civilization given rightful and accurate representation? Is American Indian culture evaluated in terms of its own values and attitudes rather than in terms of those of another culture?" Another consideration mentioned was the effect of the material on a Native person's self-image. Along with selection guidelines we can use a cataloging perspective to ask ourselves, "How does the language of cataloging contribute (or not) to the meeting these evaluation requirements?"

KW: In library school we didn't touch on any issues related to this, but right before I graduated, I came upon the work of Sandy Berman and got my eyes opened. His writing about racism and ethnocentrism in Library of Congress subject headings got me thinking about how Native topics are reflected in LCSH. Then I started my first professional job and cataloged my first book about American Indians. I turned to the E schedule and saw, "Pre-Columbian America. The Indians." I thought at first that was where all books on Indians went: in the historical section. I remember my cheeks actually burned as I thought about having to follow that practice. I was used to that kind of ignorance out in the world, but the thought of having to perpetuate it in my job as a cataloger felt terrible. Eventually I found that my book would go in the next section of the classification table, Indians of North America, but that drew my attention to the subtle implications in LC classification and its treatment of Indians. What is signified by the placement of Indians of North America after Pre-Columbian American and before Discovery of America? The use of that problematic last phrase implies the Indians were either gone by the start of American history, or just didn't matter enough to be counted as part of it. Shortly afterward, I attended my first American Indian Library Association meeting. One of the agenda topics was a discussion of a memo Sandy Berman had sent to AILA, regarding several possible changes to LCSH. The suggestions included changes to the umbrella heading Indians of North America, correcting specific tribal names, and the proposal of a subject heading then used at Hennepin County Library: NATIVE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST (1492-1900). The ideas were well received, but unfortunately never acted on until now. Since then, I've tried to learn all I can about the issues and what can be done to remedy some of the problems.

Some Examples of How Standard Practice Is Problematic

AD: There is a growing international body of work by LIS scholars and practitioners that talks about that feeling you had of your cheeks burning. Library and Archives Canada completed an Aboriginal community consultation process in 2003. Its report recommended that deficiencies in subject headings and cataloging practices be given priority citing the following rationale: "There is a need to re-teach the 'experts,' such as cataloguers, about the terms used to describe Aboriginal peoples. Issues of racism and ignorance are raised by present cataloguing standards and terminology."
Classification systems carry systemic biases; they reflect the values and perspectives of their makers. In the case of Native American/Aboriginal topics, the LIS literature cites the following issues as problematic in mainstream library cataloging practices: marginalization; historicization; omission; lack of specificity; failure to organize materials in effective ways; lack of relevance; and lack of recognition of the sovereignty of American Indian nations. Inaccurate and inappropriate subject representation also affects reference services because it limits both the efficiency and accuracy of information retrieval, and thereby erodes the quality of services to patrons.

The treatment of Aboriginal people in LC classification is a great barrier to effective access. Hope Olson's *The Power to Name* cites Gillian Rose's spatial metaphors of the ghetto and the diaspora to describe a fundamental dynamic of marginalized groups and topics. The ghetto isolates by concentrating in a single area and the diaspora scatters within a homogeneous mass so there is no identifiable existence. Library catalogs replicate this dynamic by ghettoizing Indigenous peoples in North America in a single area of the classification schedule, regardless of discipline. Subject headings that are either too general or nonexistent diasporize Indigenous topics throughout a Western knowledge taxonomy.

Over thirty-five years ago, Thomas Yen-Ran Yeh’s careful analysis of the LC classification identified many of these problems. For example, he cites the segregation of the American Indian from the class for the History of America, and the complete exclusion of the American Indian from the local history schedule [F1-975]. He notes that the last date in the schedule for American Indian history is E83.895, “Chippewa War, 1898,” which suggests that American Indians do not live in the twentieth century, but as Kelly says, in Antiquities. Yeh's suggested corrections elicited a dismissive response from the Library of Congress: “It is quite clear from the tables themselves that the intention of the creators of the classification was to treat the modern Indians as remnants of a vast group of peoples who once populated the entire New World long before the arrival of the Europeans. This conceptualization of the Indians is still valid today, it seems to us.” This example of those in power defining how knowledge of different groups is made accessible might be dismissed as a product of that time, but the problematic classification Yeh highlighted has yet to be changed.

KW: The practice of classifying all things Native American in the E schedule is problematic no matter what kind of collecting is being organized, for the reasons Ann describes. Its limitations are especially obvious when working with a collection that is heavy on materials about Native Americans, whether it is a tribal library or a special collection in another type of library. Once I did some cataloging at Little Big Horn College on the Crow reservation, and of course there was a lot of material shelved at E99.C92. If the book were about Crow medicine, you'd find it there squeezed in with Crow history and Crow art and Crow philosophy, instead of in the R schedule. Those shelves were so crowded that it was difficult to locate anything. After I'd completed my work there, I found that someone had drawn up an alternate scheme specifically for that library that would allow for the dispersal of Crow materials throughout the range of LC class numbers; for example, Crow education would be classed with other works about education and Crow art with works about art, and so forth. I wish I had seen that when I started,
but it did make it clear to me that libraries need more than just an alternate scheme to improve access through classification — they also need staff trained to use it and keep it updated, and the staff time to adapt almost all the records received through copy cataloging. Both of things are luxuries that even large libraries don't often have.

AD: The failure of mainstream subject headings to describe even such basics as Aboriginal Nations comes up regularly at the Xwi7xwa Library. The university where I work is located on the traditional, unceded lands of the Musqueam Nation. Musqueam elders are an integral part of the university; they provide support for student and staff services, consult on protocol, serve as language instructors, and frequently open campus events and ceremonies. Musqueam leaders serve on administrative bodies, such as the university senate. When the Musqueam people come to the library and ask, "Where are the library materials on Musqueam? Where are all the materials written by the anthropologists, and the linguists, and the historians on our people?" I have to reply, "There is no word for Musqueam in the library world, there is no section on the university library shelves for Musqueam." Musqueam is subsumed and erased under COAST SALISH INDIANS, a generic heading that also swallows other First Nations in the area. These examples are representative of the mainstream cataloging treatment of First Nations people and topics in the lower mainland of British Columbia where I live, and for many other parts of the country. The Xwi7xwa Library cataloging practice, however, is an exception in that it aims to accurately represent names of First Nations, Aboriginal people, places, and concepts. At Xwi7xwa, Musqueam is named and does have a place on the shelves. The library uses the standard MARC record fields to carry variant personal names: for example, using both Degonwadonti and Beth Brant for the Tyendinaga Mohawk writer. The University of British Columbia has provided core funding for the library's continued work in this area, and supports an Aboriginal classification scheme.

There is a burgeoning interdisciplinary literature produced by First Nations/Aboriginal scholars who are designing and conducting research, as well as publishing. At the same time, governments at all levels are funding research that seeks to address socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people, which produces another body of interdisciplinary literature ranging from health to education to resource development and commerce. The ongoing treaty negotiations and claims processes also produce a body of associated literatures. Of course, many sectors are also interested in how Aboriginal knowledges of local environments and Aboriginal views of the world can enrich their endeavors. There is a knowledge sector dedicated to mining Aboriginal knowledges, such as traditional use and environmental knowledge. From Aboriginal perspectives, there is a strong repatriation impetus that seeks to reclaim Aboriginal property in all forms, including intellectual property and cultural property, and to access knowledge produced by Aboriginal people and relevant to Aboriginal interests that is held in public institutions and repositories. There is a pressing need for design and development of classification tools, including accurate, relevant subject description, that give voice to this rapidly expanding universe of Aboriginal materials.

KW: Another example of how inappropriate terminology affects access that comes immediately to mind is the LC subject heading INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA—RELOCATION, which was changed from the earlier heading, INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA—
REMOVAL. I suppose the change was made to bring the heading into line with patterns for other groups, but it feels like a slap in the face, frankly. All the pain and betrayal and death that went along with the forced removal of tribes is just not reflected in the term "relocation." This impedes access because a patron doing research in this area, especially a Native patron, might not think to associate this term with the actual events. It’s one of the many ways that the library can come across as a white institution, adding another barrier to promoting its use in Native communities. Then there are glaring omissions from LCSH of terms and concepts such as First Nations, Urban Indians, and Federal Indian Law.

A Change Is Going to Come ... Some Examples of Alternative Practice

Fortunately, there are many organizations and people around the world working to develop and put into practice alternative ways of organizing and providing access to Indigenous works in their collections, some of which we will describe below. There are also efforts to help improve standard practice. For instance, the American Indian Library Association recently established a Subject Access and Classification Committee which plans to submit proposals for new LCSH terms through the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO), which allows libraries to submit subject headings and classification numbers to the Library of Congress. We are grateful for the many thesaurus projects underway that can guide us in this work.6

Australia

Aboriginal Thesaurus: The National Library of Australia is developing this tool to improve access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works. As Heather Moorcroft, one of the compilers, states on the project web site, “It is important that the Indigenous voices of Australia are heard and felt through proper representation in catalogues. It is very important that we as thesaurus makers are imaginative and creative and do not rely wholly on the literature itself because so much has been written ABOUT Aboriginal people, and not so much BY Aboriginal people, but this is changing. This means that we need to find the ‘right’ words in other ways.”7

New Zealand

Māori Subject Headings: The Māori Subject Headings grew out a research project on the information needs of Māori people which found that subject representation of Māori topics was inappropriate and library classification and arrangement were not understood. The Māori subject headings aim to provide improved access to the Māori body of knowledge held in public institutions for Māori people.

Canada

Brian Deer Classification Scheme: <http://www.library.ubc.ca/xwi7xwa/deer.pdf> The Brian Deer system of classification was developed by a Kahnawake Librarian for the
National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations. Gene Joseph, Gitxsan Dakelh, the founding librarian (1993) of the Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia, selected this Indigenous scheme for the collection, recognizing that the future of a new library, including the development of its collections and the quality of its services, depends on the organization of the knowledge and the ways in which it is named. At the Xwi7xwa Library, the knowledge organization aims to be congruent with and to reinforce Indigenous worldviews and experience in support of a mandate to make the university’s vast resources more accessible to Aboriginal peoples. Brian Deer classification has been used by several Aboriginal libraries in B.C., including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the En’owkin Center.

**British Columbia First Nations Names:**<http://www.library.ubc.ca/xwi7xwa/bcfn.pdf> The Xwi7xwa Library maintains and continues to develop an authority list of First Nations in the province of B.C. The authority list is used in cataloging materials held by the library, as well as in providing training in Indigenous information literacy skills for students and library staff. The library strives to reflect current First Nations’ use of names and spelling.

**Library and Archives Canada (LAC):** Following a consultation with the Aboriginal community, LAC noted concerns raised about cataloging practices and proposed a phased review of its Canadian Subject Headings identifying Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. As a first step, they are currently considering revising headings containing the term “Indians” to prefer the more specific names of Aboriginal groups or nations.

**First Nations House of Learning Thesaurus:** The Library of Congress has authorized the development of the First Nations House of Learning Thesaurus. The thesaurus of First Nations/Aboriginal subject vocabulary will expand on the existing 5,500 First Nations/Aboriginal subject headings in use at Xwi7xwa Library using cultural warrant in addition to literary warrant and consultation as sources for vocabulary.

**United States**

**Dewey Classification at the American Indian Resource Center (AIRC), City of Huntington Park in Los Angeles County, California:** This collection makes use of Dewey classification that has been adapted to more adequately organize materials about American Indians. Many materials have been reclassified to favor the subject area over the American Indian aspect, so that materials could be spread throughout the collection and not crowded into the 970 range.

**Luiseno Culture Bank:** This database, which collects Luiseno artifacts and information gathered from museums, libraries, and private collections, uses a hybrid scheme that applies categories derived from the elders to augment LCSH.

**Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus Project:** Cheryl Metoyer, currently a professor at the University of Washington Information School and Chief Academic Affairs Officer for the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, has worked with many tribes to help develop their libraries and archives. She is leading a research project to develop this thesaurus for improved access to collections at the tribe’s research library and archives.
National Indian Law Library (NILL) Thesaurus: NILL uses a locally developed thesaurus in addition to Library of Congress Subject Headings for its collection of federal Indian law and tribal law materials. It is a particularly well-developed tool, with scope notes, detailed guidelines, and subdivisions.

National Native American Thesaurus: University of California, Berkeley: John D. Berry, the Native American Studies Librarian, has been developing this thesaurus for use with the National Native American Bibliographic Database. The thesaurus project follows in the footsteps of the well-developed Chicano Thesaurus, the first edition of which was produced at the University of California in 1979.

Native American Educational Services (NAES) Public Policy and Tribal Research Center and Archives Subject Index: NAES, located in Chicago, has a non-circulating collection of over 10,000 materials in a variety of formats focusing on the development of Native American communities in the 20th century. Its collection is being recataloged using this homegrown, tribally centered classification system developed by its faculty and driven by the awareness that a system reflecting a Native perspective was required to meet patron needs.

Conclusion

Accurate and culturally appropriate cataloging of Native American/Indigenous materials is not just a Native American issue, but a national and international issue. It is critical for the self-determination efforts of Indigenous people to have intellectual access to collections of materials documenting their/our histories, cultures, and languages held in libraries. This documentary heritage may be seen as the cultural and intellectual property of Native Americans barricaded behind current cataloging practice. It is also critical in terms of access to new knowledge, emergent scholarship, and contemporary works. The lack of accurate representation and access affects not only the education of Native American children but the education of all children and citizens. The spread of problematic cataloging records perpetuates stereotypes and inaccuracies. Moreover, the ubiquitous bibliographic utilities and international use of LC and DDC transmit these records worldwide. These are significant concerns for catalogers, librarians, and educators, and they warrant our vigilant attention.

Notes

1. ASD Newsletter, vol. 8, no.3, Spring 1971. The Adult Services Division (ASD) subsequently developed into the ALA Reference and User Services Association.
4. See: Berman, Calliou, Carter, Lawson, Lee, Lincoln, Martens, Moorcroft, Tomren, Szekely, Yeh, and Young.
Selected Further Reading

Listed below are resources that include discussion of cataloging Indigenous materials, and the works cited in this article. For more general resources see the bibliography *Library Services to Indigenous Populations: Viewpoints & Resources* (Chicago: Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, American Library Association, 2005).


6. The American Indian Library Association’s Subject Access and Classification Committee is compiling a more complete list of these projects. Please contact Kelly Webster through AILA if you know of examples to add.


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