

Introduction : 1971

Since the first edition of *Library of Congress Subject Headings* appeared 60 years ago, American and other libraries have increasingly relied on this list as the chief authority—if not the sole basis—for subject cataloging. There can be no quarrel about the practical necessity for such a labor-saving, worry-reducing work, nor—abstractly—about its value as a global standardizing agent, a means for achieving some uniformity in an area that would otherwise be chaotic. Undoubtedly, it is a real boon to scholars, as well as to ordinary readers, to find familiar, fairly constant headings in subject catalogs as far removed geographically as Washington, D.C., and Lusaka, Zambia. Knowledge and scholarship are, after all, universal. And a subject-scheme *should*, ideally, manage to encompass all the facets of what has been printed and subsequently collected in libraries to the satisfaction of the worldwide reading community. *Should*, that is. But in the realm of headings that deal with people and cultures—in short, with humanity—the LC list can only “satisfy” parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle- and higher-income brackets, largely domiciled in suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization.¹ Further, it reflects a host of untenable—indeed, obsolete and arrogant—assumptions with respect to young people and women.² And exudes something less than sympathy or even fairness toward organized labor and the sexually unorthodox or “avant-garde.”

In reply to a brief assault on the “racist/colonialist bias,” double-standards, and “self-serving euphemisms” embodied in the LC scheme,³ A. C. Foskett explained that both the LC and Sears schema “are designed for use in Western libraries” and so “reflect the historical bias of those libraries and their users.”⁴ Exactly the point! Once recognized, surely the most foolish and wrong-headed aspects of the bias can be corrected. Mr. Foskett admitted, in fact, that the sort of *Baaskap* nonsense limned in that initial attack might be “objectionable” within “the context of a different tradition.”⁵ Why not “objectionable” *anywhere*?⁶ Just because the scheme germinated, historically, within a Western framework of late Victorianism, rampant industrial expansion, and feverish empire-building (with its “White Man’s Burden” rationale)—just because, in short, we were “brought up that way” is no valid reason for perpetuating, either in our crania or catalogues, the humanity-degrading, intellect-constricting rubbish that litters the LC list.⁷ Moreover, within the context of a world increasingly polarized between White/Black, rich/poor, West/Tiers-Monde, the burden is fully and immediately upon *us* to at least rectify the worst features of library practice: in cataloging, the selection of “relevant” (even if controversial) material, service to long-bypassed groups, and—with particular reference to Western institutions—employment.⁸ “Which side are you on?” asked striking miners years ago in a song that has since become an American folk staple. The question holds with even greater immediacy now.⁹

The cry to “tell it like it is” currently echoes, justifiably, around the globe.¹⁰ Granted, being fallible, we don’t always know precisely *what* it is or *how* to “tell it.” Still, simple honesty and our own professional commitment to elemental decency require that we *try*.

Mr. Foskett concluded his remarks with the comment that if the fault-finding letter-writer “wants a disinterested scheme, he will have to look elsewhere.”¹¹ Such advice, however well-intentioned, evades the issue. The LC scheme, like it or not, dominates the subject-cataloging scene.¹² It may be somewhat optimistic, yes, to believe it can be wholly metamorphosed into the *disinterested* tool that most American (and other) libraries, presumably democratic and egalitarian in spirit, desire. But on the other hand, it is impossibly

utopian, an exercise in fantasy, to expect that even hugely-disgruntled librarians will scrap it completely in favor of another, better scheme that hasn't yet materialized. And probably never will.

What follow, then, are not *dicta* nor *commandments*, but rather probes—hopefully provocative—into what has been a largely unquestioned orthodoxy; a not-so-delicate burrowing into the subject-muck that constitutes an important element of our “professional practice” and which we have cheerfully (if, in most cases, innocently) propagated to our all-too-receptive brethren across the seas. If this be incitement, good. But not to riot, if you please—only to remedy long-standing mistakes and to gain for the profession a genuine, earned respect among people who read and think.

Four final observations:

1. Some, not “bad” people, will make the argument-from-inertia that to correct even the most glaring outrages presently embedded in library catalogs would require too massive an undertaking in time and labor, that it is not easy to at once undo the mess that has accumulated over half a century, that the job is inconvenient.¹³ Assuredly, this is no flippant nor meanly inspired objection. Yet the certain “inconvenience” must be weighed against the colossal demands of our revolutionary age and professional integrity alike. Once weighed, we are unquestionably ingenious and energetic enough (not to mention well-enough equipped with electric typewriters and erasers)—whether at LC itself or in our individual institutions—to do what must be done.

2. The profession has lately undergone, in Sidney L. Jackson's opinion, a “ten-year struggle,” expending vast amounts of “labor and money,” to fashion “a new code for main entries, while neglecting by and large the problems of subject access.” His conclusion, based on hard evidence demonstrating a reader preference for the “subject approach,” is that the main entry campaign, “in terms of *user advantage*,” was a “*monumental blunder*.”¹⁴ Although Jackson does not spotlight ingrained bias as one of the problem priorities in subject cataloging, it must certainly rate high in the sort of thoroughgoing examination and reform he advocates. The cardinal point here is that, from a purely pragmatic view, we have probably been riding backwards on the wrong horse.

3. Questioning the basic philosophy that underpins LC practice, Joan Marshall writes:

The guiding principles of the establishment of subject headings in the LC list are set forth in Haykin's *Subject Headings: A Practical Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1951). The first of the fundamental concepts in the establishment of a heading, as stated by Haykin (p. 7), is "that the reader is the focus in all cataloging principles and practice." The terminology, therefore, of an effective and easy-to-approach catalog must be determined by the majority of the readers' probable psychological approach, rather than a *logical* approach, to the subject. References serve the needs of minorities.

This "cataloging axiom" has two serious faults. The first is the assumption that libraries, keeping "in mind the kind of reader the library serves, his social background and intellectual level" (p. 9), tailor-make subject headings to suit their patrons. This assumption is unfounded. Libraries use lists. The use of maintained, up-dated lists is an economic necessity (and has the added desirability of creating uniformity of usage from library to library). Since the use of lists is the norm, the list-makers must accept responsibility for viewing their reader as an aggregate who has varied social backgrounds and intellectual levels. Since the reader cannot validly be identified, assumptions about his probable psychological approach to a subject result in serious lapses in logic.

The second fault of the axiom is that it violates the principle, constantly defended in regard to our collections, that libraries do not exhibit bias. If librarians defend their right as educators to present all points of view in their collections, they must accept their obligation to provide an approach to their collections that is equally without bias, and which does not reinforce the psychological, sociological, economic, political, etc. assumptions and prejudices of their readers. Such obvious pandering to the "social backgrounds and intellectual levels" of a library's clientele as the entry of works under *FILTHY BOOKS* or *NIGGERS* would be castigated by the profession; it would be recognized that such an obviously biased *approach* to the material biased the *material*, whatever its content.¹⁵

What we must come to recognize are the more subtle forms of the reinforcement of attitudes through a biased subject heading approach.

The LC list, in its headings referring to persons, reflects the

application of Haykin's axiom (actually, though not logically, Haykin's axiom is a statement of LC subject heading policy—the list came before the guide). The list's bias and illogicality are a reflection of its identification of the majority reader and the extrapolation from that identification that *that* reader is the norm. An examination of the list makes it clear that the “majority reader” (and the norm)—as far as LC is concerned—is white, Christian (usually Protestant), and male.¹⁶

4. This “tract” has emphatically *not* been conceived as an *ad hominem* attack on the LC editors and staff. They perform, competently, a gargantuan labor, which deserves our appreciation. The following critique ought not to be construed as an insult to them, but instead as an aid and plea for finally grappling with a significant matter—the reexamination of inherited assumptions and underlying values—that in the past has probably seemed too difficult or insufficiently pressing to confront because of the sheer volume of traffic, of other things to do. An aid, then, and a plea—directed to *all* of us—to attend to urgent business.

The cited examples and complaints may well be multiplied, and perhaps even more penetratingly analyzed, by an alert and sensitive profession. Let the dialogue and *action* begin. . .

Notes

1. In broader perspective, of course, it is not alone in this many-pronged bias. Similar ills beset educational systems and the publishing world itself. For a report, e.g., on stereotyping and racism in British school texts, cf. Ian Stewart, “Readers as a Source of Prejudice?,” *Race Today*, v. 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1970), p. 27–8. *Rank and File*, “produced by left-wing teachers within the N.U.T. [National Union of Teachers],” similarly carries incisive, usually firsthand material on racial and religious bias in British classrooms; cf., for instance: Mike Slatter, “Racialism. . . One Teacher's Experience,” no. 6 (June 1969), p. 9–10, and Maurice Hill, “Religious Discrimination in Our Schools,” no. 7 (Sept. 1969), p. 20–1. The quarterly bulletin issued by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (9 East 40th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016), together with the bimonthly *Integrated Education: Race and Schools* and *Changing Education*, the American Federation of Teachers' journal, furnish like data on the American scene. And so, frequently, do

"Movement" organs like *Liberation*; cf., e.g., Steve Gold, "Unlearning White Racism," v. 14, no. 1 (March/April 1969), p. 21-9.

Perhaps no one has more compellingly and thoroughly examined the mechanics and effects of cultural "brain-washing" and White-instigated de-racination among people of specifically African descent—in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa—than Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). "He demonstrates," said one reviewer, "how insidiously the problem of race, of color, connects with a whole range of words and images." Robert Coles, *New York Times Book Review*, April 30, 1967, p. 3. His work is thus essential reading for anyone wanting a fuller perspective on the psychosocial impact of "Westernism" upon non-Western and minority peoples.

As another, necessary overview of racist contagion among Western peoples, a slender volume that nonetheless makes a multitude of excellent conceptual distinctions and lucidly defines many terms often misused by laymen and specialists alike, cf. Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism; A Comparative Perspective* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967). Granting that "racism" may be found "in a number of societies," the author emphasizes that "it remains true that the Western strain of the virus has eclipsed all others in importance. Through the colonial expansion of Europe, racism spread widely over the world.

"Apart from its geographical spread, no other brand of racism has developed such a flourishing mythology and ideology. In folklore, as well as in literature and science, racism became a deeply ingrained component of the Western Weltanschauung. Western racism had its poets like Kipling, its philosophers like Gobineau and Chamberlain, its statesmen like Hitler, Theodore Roosevelt, and Verwoerd; this is a record not even remotely approached in either scope or complexity by any other cultural tradition." Cf. "Introduction," p. 13.

2. In this regard, again, it fits into and mirrors a much larger societal pattern. For insightful critiques of "women's subjugation in our society," cf. the lately-arisen "women's liberation" vehicles like *No More Fun and Games and Women: A Journal of Liberation*, both approvingly reviewed by Mary McKenney in the April 15, 1970, *Library Journal* (v. 95, no. 8) p. 1459.

Young people, too, have taken up the cudgels on their own behalf, zestfully and often angrily assailing the hoary shibboleth that youth should "be seen and not heard." Bill Katz, on p. 354 of his *Magazines for Libraries* (New York: Bowker, 1969), cites a number of such "student power" organs, confected wholly by high schoolers. Still more data on the genre can be secured from the Amerikan Press Syndicate, 9426 Santa Monica Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California 90210.

3. Sanford Berman, "Chauvinistic Headings," *Library Journal*, v. 94,

no. 4 (Feb. 15, 1969), p. 695; subsequently reprinted, with some changes, in the *Zambia Library Association Journal*, v. 1, no. 2 (June 1969), p. 31-3.

4. "Dead Heads?," *Library Journal*, v. 94, no. 8 (April 15, 1969), p. 1559.

5. *Ibid.* "Chauvinistic Headings" originated in a Central African milieu, the writer having discovered, "after three weeks of using the LC subject heading list at the University of Zambia Library," that what he had "long suspected" had "now been disgustingly confirmed: Western chauvinism permeates the scheme." Berman, *op. cit.*

6. Of that ice-breaking *LJ* letter, *ibid.*, Donald B. Engley, librarian, and Mrs. Marian Clarke, curator, at Trinity College Library, Hartford, Connecticut, declared in a statement sent to both LC and the American Library Association: "In it [the writer] makes the point that our major cataloging and classification schemes reflect a western racist/colonial bias. We believe that this is evident not only in an African setting such as his, but also to the sensitive observer anywhere in the world today." Quoted from a carbon copy, dated March 13, 1969.

7. This is not to propound a "magic-wand" thesis that once the LC "prejudices and antipathies" are corrected, Love and Good Feeling will radiate across the planet. But the operation may nevertheless prove a definite, if small, step in the right direction—toward amity and mutual understanding. Henri Tajfel reasonably maintains that "there is no easy way to deal with intergroup prejudice in its manifold varieties, and all one can hope for is that its more vicious and inhuman forms can be made less acute sooner or later. It is patently obvious that beliefs and views about causes of social events which are held by great masses of men are more easily accessible to change than their motives; and that there is at least a chance that a change of beliefs and views may affect in turn the management of conflicts, real or imaginary." He concludes that "it is therefore important and *useful*, for the purposes of science as well as for those of the society at large, that a consideration of prejudice as a phenomenon in the minds rather than in the guts of men should take precedence over views which are, on the whole, not only untestable but also useless in the planning of any form of relevant social change." Cf. "Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice," 1968 winner of the first annual Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize, *Journal of Social Issues*, v. 25, no. 4 (autumn 1969), p. 96.

8. On the employment-promotion imperatives re women, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, etc., cf., as examples: Anita R. Schiller, "Women Employed in Libraries; The Disadvantaged Majority," *American Libraries*, v. 1, no. 4 (April 1970), p. 345-49; "Librarians Must Care," an editorial, *ibid.*, p. 335; "Library Employment of Minority Group Personnel; LAD Report," *ALA Bulletin*, v. 63, no. 7 (July/Aug. 1969), p. 985-87; Fay M. Blake, "What's Happening to the Dream?," *WLB*, v. 43, no. 5 (Jan. 1969),

p. 474–75; E. J. Josey, “Black Aspirations, White Racism, and Libraries,” *WLB*, v. 44, no. 1 (Sept. 1969), p. 97–8+; “Black Decision Makers,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 11 (June 1, 1969), p. 2203–06; Phyllis S. Anderson, “Marchant’s Misogyny [letter],” *LJ*, v. 95, no. 9 (May 1, 1970), p. 1680; and Janet Freedman, “The Liberated Librarian?—A Look at the ‘Second Sex’ in the Library Profession,” *ibid.*, p. 1709–11.

The principal library periodicals have almost literally exploded over the past two years with guides, checklists, bibliographies, and exhortations designed to promote selection of books, magazines, and audiovisual matter for minority-group readers, young people, “ecophiliacs,” radicals, conservatives, “peaceniks,” draft-resisters, and the “disadvantaged.” As merely a few examples, cf.: Effie Lee Morris, “Blowing in the Wind; Books on Black History and Life in America,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 6 (March 15, 1969), p. 1298–1300; James E. Wright, “Help Change the Pecking Order; A Booklist for Negro History Week,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1969), p. 153–55; four articles on the “underground” and Chicano press, including an extensive bibliography by Ned Kehde, *Missouri Library Association Quarterly*, v. 30, no. 3 (Sept. 1969); Sanford Berman, “Where It’s At,” *LJ*, v. 93, no. 22 (Dec. 15, 1968), p. 4615–18; Henry P. Durkin, “Where It’s Also At,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 9 (May 1, 1969), p. 1839–40; Michael J. Spencer, “Why Is Youth So Revolting Nowadays?,” *WLB*, v. 43, no. 7 (March 1969), p. 640–47; Daniel Tatko and Carol Brown, “The Underground and New Left Press,” *ibid.*, p. 648–52; Sanford Berman, “African Magazines for American Libraries,” *LJ*, v. 95, no. 7 (April 1, 1970), p. 1289–93; Carrie Robinson, “Media for the Black Curriculum,” *ALA Bulletin*, v. 63, no. 2 (Feb. 1969), p. 242–46; Michael Darvell, “Long Live the Revolution!,” *Assistant Librarian*, v. 63, no. 2 (Feb. 1970), plus replies in v. 63, no. 4 (April 1970), p. 58–9; Anne Leibl, “Canada’s Underground Press,” *Canadian Library Journal*, v. 27, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1970), p. 16–23; the symposium on “Who Speaks for Youth?,” *LJ*, v. 95, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1970), p. 205–17; “Books by and About the American Negro,” *ibid.*, p. 218–19; Madeline Kirschner, “Puerto Rican Bibliography; Serving the Spanish Community,” *RQ*, v. 9, no. 1 (fall 1969), p. 9–19; Binnie Tate, “Integrating Culture: A Credo for Believers,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 10 (May 15, 1969), p. 2053–56; Jane Coffman, “The CO and the Draft,” *ibid.*, p. 2059–65; and Sylvia Price, “Books for the Counter-Culture,” *LJ*, v. 94, no. 11 (June 1, 1969), p. 2193–2202. Cf. further the “Afro-American,” “Dissident,” and “Underground Newspapers” sections in Katz, *op cit.*; *Synergy’s* March/April 1970 “Ecology” issue (no. 26); and *Sipapu*, “a newsletter for librarians, scholars, editors and others concerned with ethnic studies, the counter-culture, and the underground press” (c/o Noel Peattie, ed., Collection Development Section, University Library, University of California, Davis 95616).

For insights into “outreach” and “High John”-type programs as the

library response to a demonstrated, escalating need for improved and expanded service to the rural poor, prison and other institutional readers, the ghettoized multitudes, and the elderly, cf.: 12 articles collectively titled "Libraries and the Spanish-Speaking," *WLB*, v. 44, no. 7 (March 1970); Antoine Predock, "Branch Library Permutations, or the Socially Oriented Library," *MLA Quarterly*, v. 30, no. 2 (June 1969), p. 136-40; Carla Stoffle, "Public Library Service to the Disadvantaged; A Bibliography," pt. 1, *LJ*, v. 94, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1969), pt. 2, v. 94, no. 3 (Feb. 1, 1969); *Public Library Service to the Disadvantaged; Proceedings of an Institute: Dec. 7th and 8th, 1967* (Atlanta: Division of Librarianship, Emory University, 1969); the "Library Outreach" issue of *WLB*, guest-edited by John C. Frantz, v. 43, no. 9 (May 1969), p. 848-904; John M. Cloud, "Why Didn't They Burn the Libraries?," *WLB*, v. 43, no. 8 (April 1969), p. 787+; Major Owens, "A Model Library for Community Action," *LJ*, v. 95, no. 9 (May 1, 1970), p. 1701-04; and Dorothy Romani, "Guidelines for Library Service to the Institutionalized Aging," *American Libraries*, v. 1, no. 3 (March 1970), p. 286-89.

9. Itzhak Epstein, writing in the May 1969 *Jewish Liberation Journal*, candidly relates the old refrain to the modern situation. "A polarization," he notes, "is taking place in the land and it looks like it is sharpening. As the gap widens and the opposing camps become more easily identifiable, it becomes more difficult to be neutral. At such times the question arises—*which side are you on?* Do you stand with the draft board or with the draft resister, with the slumlord or with the slum-dweller, with the student fighting for a meaningful education or with the educational bureaucracy and its corporate allies? Are you on the side of vulgar consumption or with the creators of meaningful life-styles? Will you be a 'good German' while increased oppression is applied around you and in your name or will you put your body on the line in a futile attempt to stop the madness? Will you mouth the pious dogma that assimilation is good for Blacks, Jews, Indians and other minority nations dwelling among the Whites in this land, or will you try to pass and qualify for membership in the DAR? . . ." Cf. "American Jewry: On the Barricades or on the Fence?," v. 1, no. 1, p. 3. Emphasis added. While Epstein apostrophizes American Jewry, the core question may just as well be asked of *everyone*.

10. Although it's not really a "modern" or especially "hip" idea, for much earlier Hans Christian Andersen masterfully conveyed the same message in "The Emperor's New Clothes."

11. *Op. cit.*

12. Says Jay Daily, most poignantly, "We have nothing else." Cf. "Many Changes, No Alternatives," *LJ*, v. 92, no. 19 (Nov. 1, 1967), p. 3961.

13. In Daily's view, this is LC's posture. "In point of fact," he claims, "the Library of Congress needs remarkable urging to change a heading for any reason. . . . The reason is the vast cost of changing all those headings on

all those cards, let alone the work of picking out the heading and its cross-references from the closely knitted fabric of the whole list." *Op. cit.*, p. 3962.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 3526. Emphasis in original.

15. Unhappily, however, the profession has *not* recognized nor castigated even *these* "obvious" forms of "pandering." Cf., for example, the discussions that follow under LITERATURE, IMMORAL; KAFIRS; and NEGROES.

16. Personal communication, dated June 23, 1970.