Ethnic Groups and Library of Congress Subject Headings

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INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges of studying ethnic groups is the abundant and changing terminology associated with these groups and their study. This article explains the Library of Congress subject headings (LCSH) that relate to ethnic groups, ethnology, and ethnic diversity and how they are used in libraries. A database that uses a controlled vocabulary, such as LCSH, can be invaluable when doing research on ethnic groups, because it can help searchers conduct searches that are precise and comprehensive.

Keyword searching is an ineffective way of conducting ethnic studies research because so many individual ethnic groups are known by so many different names. Take the Mohawk Indians for example. They are also known as the Canienga Indians, the Caughnawaga Indians, the Kaniakehaka Indians, the Mohagu Indians, the Saint Regis Indians, and by other names. Because different sources from different times and places use different terms, a keyword search on only a single term for the Mohawk Indians will never generate a comprehensive search result. But by using a controlled vocabulary, such as LCSH, a single term can be assigned to bibliographic records for works about the Mohawk Indians, regardless of what they are called in each work. In this way, a search will pull up all resources about the Indians. regardless of what the resource calls them.

After explaining and giving examples of the Library of Congress subject headings for ethnic groups, this article will examine Prospector http:// prospector.coalliance.org/> holdings for selected ethnicity-related subject headings. This examination will be quantitative and will compare Prospector holdings to holdings in two other selected databases.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There is not much written in the literature, especially recently, about LCSH and ethnic groups. A 1993 article by Lois Olsrud entitled Difficulties of Subject Access for Information about Minority Groups¹ provides a good background on the Library of Congress's treatment of minority groups. The treatment is broad and includes information about more than just ethnic groups, such as women, and gays and lesbians. A more polemical article by Karen A. Nuckolls describes the "Library of Congress subject heading shortfall"². Finally, an excellent and long article by Gretchen Walsh describes the pitfalls and

tricks for success in doing African studies research³. Several sections of the article touch on subject headings related to African studies.

Sanford Berman authored at least two works about Library of Congress subject headings for ethnic groups. His contentious 1991 article Things are seldom what they seem: Finding multicultural materials in library catalogs4 describes what he viewed as LCSH shortcomings at that time that related to ethnic groups and to other aspects of multiculturalism. Interestingly, this article notes an inequity in the use of the term God in subject headings. When referring to the Christian God, there was no qualification by religion after the term, but for other religions there was. For example the heading God-History of doctrines is a heading for Christian works, and God (Judaism)-History of doctrines for works on Judaism. The default was for Christianity. Recently the Library of Congress changed this policy and now requires the gloss "(Christianity)" after "God" for works on Christian theology. Berman's article outlining these different practices and calling for change was published in 1992. So change does occur in LCSH. it just takes time. Although this is not a discussion of religious headings in this article, this example from Berman is cited to demonstrate the pace of change in LCSH. A much earlier (1978) article by Berman⁵ (not viewed) also describes perceived shortcomings for subject headings for ethnic groups in LCSH.

BACKGROUND

Ethnic politics has always been a delicate issue in the United States, and subject headings related to ethnic groups and ethnology have been no different. Just as the terms we have used over the years to refer to specific ethnic groups have changed, so have the subject headings that refer to the groups. At times these changes have been controversial, but for the most part the changes in the popular usage for ethnic groups have been reflected in LCSH. This study will avoid the political aspects of subject headings relating to ethnic groups and instead will focus on explaining how to use the subject headings as a tool for accessing information about those groups.

A database such as an online catalog that correctly uses and applies the Library of Congress subject headings is still the best and most efficient system for organizing and quickly finding information about ethnology and ethnic groups. Subject

headings are recorded in authority records that are created and distributed to libraries and other agencies by the Library of Congress. These authority records have several functions. One is to record the authorized heading for a person, place, thing, and such; including ethnic groups. Another function is to list variant forms—or synonyms—of the main heading. These variant forms are also called cross references, and they refer a researcher from a variant form of the name of something to the authorized form.

For example, on the authority record for Buraku people, the term *Buraku people* is listed on the authority record as the authorized form of the name. There are several cross references on the record, including *Aeta (Japanese people) and Tokushu burakumin (Japanese people)*. The heading selected as the main heading is generally the one that is most commonly used in reference sources. Still the selection of the main heading, and consequently the selection of what the cross references will be, can seem arbitrary. But the selection of a single authorized form is essential for in a controlled vocabulary two terms cannot represent the same concept.

A searchable database of authority records, called the Library of Congress Authorities, is freely available on the Internet at http://authorities.loc. gov. In this database every country has a heading that follows the pattern, *Ethnology—[place]*. Under this heading for each country one can find listed as narrower terms the ethnic groups that belong to that country or region. For example to search *Ethnology—Poland* the authority record is retrieved, plus links to the authority records for the ethnic groups of that country, like this:

Ethnology—Poland

Narrower Term: Jac□wiez Narrower Term: Kashubes Narrower Term: Kurpie Narrower Term: Lasowiacy Narrower Term: Lemky

Narrower Term: Polanie (Slavic people)

Narrower Term: Poles Narrower Term: Silesians

Sometimes an ethnic group will span an area that is larger than a single country. Those ethnic groups will not be found when searching Ethnology—[place] where the place is a country. To find some ethnic groups using this method, it is necessary to search for regions or continents as the place. An example is the Goths. The record for this group can be found by searching **Ethnology—Europe**.

Note that this method of finding the ethnic groups of a place does not work for Indians of the Americas; headings for Indians are organized differ-

ently, and this will be explained below in the section on Indians. Additionally, there are numerous subject headings that relate to ethic groups in general. These will be discussed in the section below with the heading, "Other Ethnology and Diversity Related Subject Headings."

AFRICAN-AMERICANS

Among the controversies relating to subject headings for ethnic groups that have occurred over the years, perhaps none has been greater than that regarding the choice of heading for African Americans. Throughout most of the 20th century, the heading was Negroes. This changed in the late 1970s when the form was changed to Blacks. Later, in the 1990s, the heading was changed again, this time to Afro-Americans. A few years ago the heading was changed again, so the current heading is African Americans. Libraries are necessarily conservative about changing subject headings not so much because they are conservative institutions, but because of the labor involved in changing headings. In the days of card catalogs, it was cumbersome to change headings because library staff had to change the actual catalog cards. Now with automated systems, the task has become somewhat easier, but manual changing of bibliographic records is still often necessary when subject headings are changed.

Authority records, in addition to listing the main heading and the cross references, occasionally also provide what are called scope notes that guide librarians and library users in the correct assignment and usage of particular subject headings. For example, here is the scope note on the authority record for *African Americans*:

Here are entered works on citizens of the United States of black African descent. Works on blacks who temporarily reside in the United States, such as aliens, students from abroad, etc., are entered under *Blacks-United States*. Works on blacks outside the United States are entered under *Blacks-[place]*.

An additional scope note also advises users to search for subject headings that begin with *African American*. There are numerous subject headings that follow this pattern, for example *African American nurses*. This practice of using the adjectival form of an ethnic group's name followed by a noun is the rule in LCSH for Indians and for American ethnic groups. Additional examples following this pattern are:

African American art
African American Methodists
African American preaching
African American radio stations

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It is not true that the subject heading *African Americans* has completely replaced the heading *Blacks*. Because only Americans can be African Americans, there has to be a term for people of African origin outside of the United States, and that term is *Blacks*.

The scope note on the record for **Blacks** explains the proper usage of this heading:

Here are entered works on blacks as an element in the population. Theoretical works discussing the black race from an anthropological point of view are entered under **Black** race.

Works on black people in countries whose racial composition is predominantly black are assigned headings appropriate for the country as a whole without the use of the heading *Blacks*. The heading *Blacks* is assigned to works on such countries only if the work discusses blacks apart from other groups in the country.

So, to explain this usage, it might help to look at the difference between the following two subject headings:

Blacks---Brazil

African Americans---Brazil

The first subject heading refers to black Brazilians living in Brazil. The second one refers to black Americans who are in Brazil. Note that the heading African Americans—United States is wrong because it is redundant. However it is not uncommon for catalogers to assign this heading mistakenly anyway. For example, the incorrect heading sometimes appears in the Prospector catalog. There may be occasion to assign the subject heading Blacks—United States. According to the authority record for the heading Blacks—United States.

Here are entered works on blacks who temporarily reside in the United States, such as aliens, students from abroad, etc. Works on citizens of the United States of black African descent are entered under **African Americans**

Note that, curiously, the Library of Congress continues to use the subject heading *Black English* and not *African American English*.

Libraries may be interested in participating in the African American Subject Funnel Project.⁶ This project is coordinated by SACO, which is the Subject Authority Cooperative Program of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging. The program provides a mechanism for libraries to propose new Library of Congress subject headings that relate to African Americans.

HISPANIC AMERICANS

This broad subject heading is used to refer

also to Latino Americans, Latinos in the United States, Hispanics in the Unites States, Spanish-speaking people in the United States, and Spanish-surnamed people in the United States. This heading is also used in its adjectival form followed by a noun, such as *Hispanic American consumers*. There is also the subject heading *Latin Americans*, which can be divided geographically to create the subject heading *Latin Americans—United States*. So what is the difference between *Hispanic Americans* and *Latin Americans—United States*? The difference is that the Hispanic Americans are United States citizens; the Latin Americans are just here on a visit.

Note also the subject heading **Mexican Americans**. The term "Chicanos" is a cross-reference under this heading. There is also a similar subject heading for every Latin American country, for example, **Peruvian Americans**. And there are many adjectival subject headings that begin with the form **Mexican American**, such as **Mexican American Folk Art**.

INDIANS

Headings for Indians are probably the most complicated of all the groups, but a basic introduction is all that is needed to understand the main concepts needed for research. The main subject heading, *Indians*, refers to "the aboriginal peoples of the Western Hemisphere, including Eskimos" according to the authority record. The subject heading *Indians* is used to refer to all Indians from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, but the Library of Congress also divides up Indians into five groups. According to the authority record for *Indians*,

For convenience, the Western Hemisphere has been divided into five basic geographical regions: North America, Mexico, Central America, West Indies, and South America. Works pertaining to Indian groups located within the confines of one of these regions are entered under Indians of the pertinent region, e.g. *Indians of North America; Indians of Mexico.*

So the five main headings are:

Indians of North America Indians of Mexico Indians of Central America Indians of South America Indians of the West Indies

The heading *Indians of North America* is further subdivided by U.S. State, Canadian province, or region (such as West (U.S.)) as shown in these examples

Indians of North America—Colorado Indians of North America—Alberta Indians of North America—West (U.S.)

This is the way, at the LC Authorities web site, individual tribes that are associated with a particular place can be found, like finding individual ethnic groups under a country or region as described above. For example, if the search words are *Indians* of North America—Colorado, these are the results:

Indians of North America—Colorado

Narrower term: Jicarilla Indians Narrower term: Moache Indians Narrower term: Tabequache Indians

Narrower term: Ute Indians

Narrower term: Wiminuche Indians

A similar search for Indians of **North America**— **Great Plains** gets these results:

Indians of North America—Great Plains

Narrower Term: Arapaho Indians Narrower Term: Arikara Indians Narrower Term: Brule□ Indians

Narrower Term: Cheyenne Indians

Narrower Term: Comanche Indians

Narrower Term: Crow Indians Narrower Term: Dakota Indians Narrower Term: Dhegiha Indians Narrower Term: Hidatsa Indians

Narrower Term: Hunkpapa Indians

Narrower Term: Iowa Indians Narrower Term: Kiowa Indians Narrower Term: Mandan Indians Narrower Term: Mill Creek Indians

Narrower Term: Miniconjou Indians Narrower Term: Oglala Indians

Narrower Term: Omaha Indians

Narrower Term: Oneota Indians (Great

Plains)

Narrower Term: Oohenonpa Indians

Narrower Term: Oto Indians Narrower Term: Ponca Indians Narrower Term: Sans Arc Indians Narrower Term: Santee Indians Narrower Term: Saone Indians Narrower Term: Sihasapa Indians

Narrower Term: Siksika Indians Narrower Term: Siouan Indians

Narrower Term: Sisseton Indians Narrower Term: Teton Indians

Narrower Term: Yankton Indians

Of course it is possible to search each Indian tribe directly; the method shown above is helpful when a searcher does not know the tribes of a state or region or when one wants to get a list of tribes of a particular area. It is possible that an Indian tribe or ethnic group exists for which there is no established subject heading; the available subject headings

reflect only those tribes about which materials have been added to library collections creating the need for a corresponding subject heading.

Some subject headings exist that represent groups of Indians, such as *Algonquian Indians*. There are see also references under these groups in the index display for the tribes that are a part of the larger group.

Also there exist many headings using the adjectival form of the tribes' names. Here are the ones that are established for Cherokee Indians:

Cherokee art

Cherokee astronomy

Cherokee baskets

Cherokee calendar

Cherokee cookery

Cherokee dance

Cherokee drawing

Cherokee incantations

Cherokee language

Cherokee law

Cherokee literature

Cherokee magic

Cherokee mythology

Cherokee painting

Cherokee poetry

Cherokee pottery

Cherokee weapons

Cherokee women

Cherokee youth

Each Indian tribe will not necessarily have all these subject headings established for the tribe, and other tribes may have subject headings established that are not on this list. It all depends on what books have been written and cataloged on the various aspects of Indian culture. The headings are established as needed.

Note that the term Indian can also be used as an adjective and refers to all Indian groups in general. Subject heading such as *Indian mythology* and *Indian astronomy* are broad in scope because they refer to all Indian groups. These terms can be subdivided geographically. That means they can take a place name after them as a geographical subject subdivision, like in this example: *Indian astronomy—North America*. Note that the heading for this concept is not "Indians of North America—Astronomy." Note that the adjective "Indic" is used for headings relating to the country India. Some examples include:

Indic literature Mythology, Indic Science fiction, Indic Relief (Sculpture), Indic These headings are in inverted form because they are for ethnic groups that are outside the United States and are non-Indian, i.e. non-native American. The first example is not in inverted form because literatures are an exception to the inverted rule. The authority records have cross references for whatever form is not the correct form, and they will lead to the authorized form.

Note that **Native Americans** is a cross reference under the heading **Indians of North America**. Also a common question at this point is, "What does the Library of Congress call people from India?" The answer is that they are called **East Indians**.

AFRICAN PEOPLES

Another place that has a great diversity of ethnic groups is Africa. Researchers can find lists of the groups in a country or region by searching *Ethnology—[place]* at the Library of Congress Authorities web site, just as they do for ethnic groups in other countries. Most of the headings for individual groups consist of the group's name followed by the parenthetical gloss (*African people*) or a similar gloss. Here are a few examples:

!Kung (African people) Wolof (African people) Xhosa (African people) Baka (West African people)

Unlike ethnic groups in the United States and Indian tribes, LCSH does not use the adjectival form of these names. Instead, they use the inverted form. Here are some examples:

Beadwork, Xhosa Art, Zulu Mythology, Baka

ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Because the United States is a country of immigrants most of the names of the ethnic groups here include the name of the country of origin, followed by *Americans*. To demonstrate this great diversity we list below all the ethnic groups one retrieves when doing a search of *Ethnology—United States* at the Library of Congress Authorities web site.

Ethnology—United States

--See also: Afghan Americans

African Americans Afrikaner Americans Albanian Americans Alsatian Americans

Americans Arab Americans Argentine Americans Armenian Americans Asian Americans Austrian Americans Azorean Americans **Bahamian Americans** Bangladeshi Americans **Basque Americans** Belarusian Americans **Belgian Americans** Bengali Americans **Black Seminoles Bosnian Americans Brazilian Americans British Americans Bulgarian Americans** Cambodian Americans Canadian Americans Cape Verdean Americans Caribbean Americans Carpatho-Rusyn Americans Catalan Americans Central American Americans Central European Americans Chilean Americans Chinese Americans Colombian Americans Costa Rican Americans **Croatian Americans Cuban Americans** Czech Americans **Danish Americans Dominican Americans Dutch Americans** East European Americans East Indian Americans **Ecuadorian Americans Egyptian Americans Eritrean Americans Estonian Americans Ethiopian Americans European Americans** Filipino Americans Finnish Americans Flemish Americans French Americans Frisian Americans Gambian Americans Georgian Americans German Americans **Ghanaian Americans Greek Americans Grenadian Americans Guatemalan Americans** Gujarati Americans Guyanese Americans Haitian Americans Hispanic Americans **Hmong Americans**

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Honduran Americans **Hungarian Americans** Icelandic Americans Indochinese Americans Indonesian Americans Iranian Americans Irish Americans Italian Americans Ivoirian Americans Jamaican Americans Japanese Americans Korean Americans Kurdish Americans Laotian Americans Latvian Americans Lebanese Americans Liberian Americans Liechtenstein Americans Lithuanian Americans **Luxembourg Americans** Macedonian Americans Maltese Americans Maratha Americans Mexican Americans Minorcan Americans Montenegrin Americans Nicaraguan Americans Nigerian Americans Norwegian Americans Pacific Islander Americans Pakistani Americans Palatine Americans Palestinian Americans Panamanian Americans Panjabi Americans Peruvian Americans Polish Americans Portuguese Americans Romanian Americans Russian Americans Ruthenian Americans Rwandan Americans Salvadoran Americans Sami Americans Samoan Americans Scandinavian Americans Scottish Americans Serbian Americans Sierra Leonean Americans Sikh Americans Slavic Americans Slovak Americans Slovenian Americans Somali Americans Sorbian Americans South African Americans

South American Americans

South Asian Americans Southeast Asian Americans Spanish Americans Sri Lankan Americans Sudanese Americans Swabian Americans Swedish Americans **Swiss Americans** Syrian Americans Taiwanese Americans Thai Americans **Tibetan Americans** Tongan Americans Turkish Americans **Ukrainian Americans** Vietnamese Americans Walloon Americans WASPs (Persons) Welsh Americans West Indian Americans Yao Americans (Asian Americans) Yemeni Americans Yoruba Americans Yugoslav Americans

Although this list looks pretty comprehensive, there are plenty of additional ethnic groups in the United States that are not listed here. For example, there is not a listing for "Zambian Americans." Certainly the group exists, but there has not been a need to create a subject heading for the group because no book in the Library of Congress is about this group. Moreover, the list does not include ethnic groups that belong only to a specific part of the United States, such as *Melungeons*, *Appalachians* (*People*), and *New Englanders*.

OTHER ETHNOLOGY AND DIVERSITY RELATED SUBJECT HEADINGS

This section concludes by listing some terms and subject headings related to ethnic groups and making some brief comments:

Diversity: There is no such subject heading. However, Ethnic diversity is a cross reference on the record for *Pluralism* (*Social sciences*). Also Ethnic diversity policy is a cross reference on the record for *Multiculturalism*. However there is a subject heading for *Diversity in the workplace*.

Ethnic studies: There is no such subject heading. Use instead either Ethnology—Study and Teaching or Minorities—Study and teaching. Be aware of the subject headings Indigenous peoples, Ethnic relations, Race relations, Ethnic groups, Whites, and Minorities.

The world's largest landmass, Asia, has not been treated very much in this article. However, the subject headings for ethnic groups for this part of the

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world are very straightforward and can be found at the Library of Congress web site by searching *Eth-nology—[place]* where "place" is a country or region or by searching the ethnic group names directly. Note that *Asians* is a valid subject heading. There is a general subject heading for *Aboriginal Australians*. Individual groups of aboriginal Australians are established following this pattern used for this group: *Yankunytjatjara (Australian people)*. There has been no coverage of headings for Jews in this article because in LCSH they are considered adherents to a religion rather than an ethnic group. Note also the subject headings *Racially mixed people*, *Racially mixed children*, *Creoles*, and *Eurasians*.

COMPARATIVE HOLDINGS

This section provides a quantitative analysis of the holdings of the Library of Congress Catalog http://catalog.loc.gov/, the OhioLink catalog http://catalog.loc.gov/, and the Prospector http://catalog.loc.gov/, and the Prospector http://catalog.com/ for works about ethnology or ethnic groups. The subject headings in Figure 1 are taken from the examples we use in this article. This non-scientific look is only done to give a rough idea of what is held in Colorado libraries and how these holdings compare to the holdings in two other online catalogs. The OhioLink catalog is selected because it is similar to Prospector in some ways. It is a union catalog for a single state and is also an Innovative Interfaces catalog. The other catalog selected is the Library of Congress online catalog.

SUBJECT Heading	Hits in Library of Congress	Hits in OhioLink	Hits in Prospector
African American art	35	165	85
African American Methodists	35	41	7 (
African American preaching	22	37	11
African Americans	1392	2528	1212
African Americans—Brazil	0	1	1
Art, Zulu	2	3	2
Black English	104	207	107
Black race	214	399	178
Blacks—Brazil	152	123	82
BlacksUnited States	1	6	1
Buraku people	108	34	13
Cherokee language	1	4	2
Cheyenne Indians	43	83	136
Creoles	17	39	29
Ethnology—Poland	56	36	11
Ethnology—Study and Teaching	22	28	19
Hispanic American consumers	17	18	20
Indians of North America—Colorado	16	32	140
Jicarilla Indians	5	7	13
Korean Americans	18	37	11
Latin Americans	2	9	12
Latin Americans—United States	20	26	30
Mexican American Folk Art	1	2	2
Mohawk Indians	25	49	22
Peruvian Americans	1	1	0
Ute Indians	37	39	167
Xhosa (African people)	28	37	19

Figure 1. Quantitative holdings analysis based on selected subject headings found in three online catalogs: Library of Congress, OhioLink, and Prospector. The data were gathered in September 2006.

Only hits for the exact subject headings listed below are counted. That is to say, records that contained the subject heading in question with additional subject subdivisions are not counted. For example, there are counted hits for *Art*, *Zulu* but not for *Art*, *Zulu*—*Bibliography*. The searches retrieved records for materials in all formats, except periodicals, which were not included because they have the subdivision *Periodicals*.

Figure 1 shows that Prospector holdings compare favorably with the holdings of the two other catalogs. Moreover, it shows that the holdings in all three catalogs for works about ethnic groups are strong, based on these representative subject headings.

CONCLUSION

Access to library materials about ethnic groups is facilitated by a controlled vocabulary such as the Library of Congress subject headings. There are many thousands of different ethnic groups and native peoples, and many of these groups and peoples have been called by different names over time, so using a controlled vocabulary with cross references from variant forms of names is crucial to providing access to these materials. The complexity of ethnic groups and ethnology is reflected in the subject headings used for these groups and their study, but the material presented here can serve as a basic introduction to conducting research in ethnic studies and can help make this research easier and more straightforward.

NOTES:

¹Lois Olsrud, "Difficulties of Subject Access for Information about Minority Groups," The Acquisitions Librarian 9/10 (1993): 47-60.

²Karen A. Nuckolls, "Subject Access to Diversity Materials: The Library of Congress Subject Heading Shortfall," The Reference Librarian 45/46 (1994): 241-251.

³Gretchen Walsh, "Can We Get There from Here?": Negotiating the Washouts, Cave-Ins, Dead Ends, and Other Hazards on the Road to Research on Africa," The Reference Librarian 87/88 (2004): 5-96.

⁴Sanford Berman, "Things are Seldom What They Seem: Finding Multicultural Materials in Library Catalogs," Alternative Library Literature 1990-1991 (1992): 132-136.

⁵Sanford Berman, "Stop Playing Hide-and-Seek with Ethnic Materials," Wilson library bulletin 52, no. 9 (May 1978): 691, 719.

⁶For more information on the African American Subject Funnel Project, visit http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pcc/saco/aframerfun.html (accessed September 23, 2006).

