

Script for LAIPA SALALM Presentation (7 June 2023)

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As the description on the Library of Congress SACO funnel page for LAIPA states, the idea for the Latin American and Indigenous Peoples of the Americas funnel came about during the course of a meeting of the Cataloging and Bibliographical Technology Subcommittee of SALALM in the course of its 2017 conference. The discussion focused on creating a gateway for catalogers who did not work at Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) institutions and who did not know how to propose subject headings, to do so.

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Perhaps more importantly, the intention behind the funnel is to provide access to aid non-catalogers in submitting subject headings. The need for changing a subject heading is likely to be heard first by non-catalogers, who deal directly with the public who may feel that they are not being described in language that they feel is appropriate, and who may suggest other alternatives that work better, are more respectful, and more correct. The goal is to improve access to materials on Latin America and Indigenous peoples and to propose new subject headings and correct old headings that the communities being described do not feel accurately represent them.

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I committed to setting up the funnel at that meeting, and asked Tim Thompson, who at that time was working at Princeton, to be co-coordinator. Our proposal was accepted in August of 2017.

Tim's work focus changed about a year and a half later and he was not able to continue as co-coordinator. Various problems arose and although individuals continued with the work, regular meetings did not resume until last year when we began to meet monthly and to keep records of those meetings. These issues included a lack of technology which caused difficulties in meeting virtually. Since the pandemic began in 2020, many workplaces have made sure that people have access to the technology needed to meet virtually, so that does not seem to be a problem any longer.

A huge issue was that the Library of Congress was not ready or able to address the issues in the subject headings and call number dealing with Indigenous peoples.

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This has changed recently, and members of LC have begun to attend our meetings and have committed to changing the headings starting from the top down. We have been asked by them to continue our work in the area, though a recent announcement has raised a lot of questions as to how they want us to do that.

Our membership is fairly fluid. People join when they feel that they can contribute and share the work they are doing, need support and help in the work that they would like to do, and want to collaborate in sharing resources and knowledge. It is my belief that the ongoing small actions that have been taken over the years and the continual desire among librarians to tackle changing the inequities in the subject headings have finally led to action in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion being encouraged and supported by library administrations. This has allowed us to take the time to work on these issues.

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The difficulty in including tribal nations in the process of authority work and knowing how to work respectfully with them remains a problem with which we are struggling. The funnel has recently posted a best practices document, which we intend to update as the work progresses, on how to approach Indigenous nations when doing this work.

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Despite the difficulties, the funnel, in the actions of its individual members, has been successful over the years in proposing changes to various subject headings which have been accepted and are now authorized. Here you can see the cross references added to the original Cherokee Indians heading to increase access. The Cherokee heading is going to need more work in the future, but for now, there is more access than there was previously.

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With Vigesimal system we were able to provide a call number and heading for base-20 mathematics which, despite not being the primary way that Western cultures calculate, is traditionally used by peoples in Africa and the Americas.

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And here, Latgawa Indians creates a heading for a tribal nation that was previously only able to be represented with the terms Indians of North America—Oregon.

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The change from Tarasco Indians to Purépecha Indians was prompted by the knowledge that the first term was considered derogatory.

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LC's original sources were sparse at best. At the time the heading was created there was not a lot of information included in the authority records.

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We were able to find quite a bit of support for the change we proposed.

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As you can see.

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And the Library of Congress agreed. They were very helpful in not only changing this heading quickly, but in changing all of the subsidiary headings that had previously used Tarasco.

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One of the major challenges we have faced until fairly recently is that the Library of Congress has not really been willing to take a close look at how the indigenous peoples of the Americas are represented in the schedules and subject headings and to figure out how to change terminology in a more culturally responsive manner.

As I mentioned earlier, this has recently changed, and they have committed to addressing these issues. The Library of Congress is going to be working from the top down, starting in the United States, and has stated the intention to describe no group of people without input from them, affirming the slogan “Nothing about us without us,” an expression used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy.

We all agree that this is extremely important and that this adjustment is not going to be a quick or easy process. The schedules organize the world from a very specific colonizer perspective and that, along with a good many other issues, will need to be dealt with. It is essential that each tribal nation weigh in on what they would prefer to be called. Fortunately, LC has expressed to us that they are going to waive literary warrant in this case and take as the authorized form the one that is chosen by the people it describes, using all other names as cross-references. Undoubtedly this is a process that is going to take time. Not only is it unreasonable to expect that all people of any given group are going to have the same opinion, it is also unreasonable to expect that our work is of high priority for tribal nations. It is also a process that will need to be revisited, as language is not static.

As catalogers through our efforts in the LAIPA funnel we can better acknowledge Indigenous cultural traditions and respect cultural perspectives by using preferred terminology.

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To illustrate some of the issues with the way in which the Library of Congress schedules reflect the organization of the world, here is a screen shot from the N (Art) schedules. Not only is the art of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas considered “primitive” it is also not even included in the Art schedules.

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Another example is in the “TX’s” where they have placed cookbooks. Although they have organized the cookbook section by ethnic group, and all of them would be found in a certain range on library shelves, cookbooks of Indigenous groups would not be found there.

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Another historical issue is the use of the word “Indian”.

There are a number of problems with using the word Indian for the indigenous peoples of the Americas, not the least of which is that many of those peoples neither like the word or use it to describe themselves. Apart from this, however, is how to distinguish these peoples from the people who are from the country known as India, or their descendants. The solution of calling those folks East Indians, is not really a sound one as they do not live in a country called East India. It causes issues in the areas of both art and literature and where Art, Indic, is used in preference to Indian art, and Indic literature is used rather than Indian literature, which is not the way that people either think of, or search for resources on those topics and is a hindrance to access.

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What is the correct terminology? American Indian, Indian, Native American, Indigenous, Native? All of these terms have been and are being used. The consensus is that Native peoples prefer to be called by the name of their specific tribal nation. However, when being discussed collectively a broader term is needed. Which term to use in this case, is more problematic, as this differs widely not only among different peoples but also within individual tribal nations, with individuals often having personal preferences.

Our feeling is that we would like to move away from the term Indian, alone or in combination with the collective “American” as it stems from the misunderstanding of the earliest European colonists. In the context of a thesaurus, it also creates confusion with the peoples of India. Both “Native” and “Indigenous” express the notion that many nations inhabited the area now known as the Americas for millennia before other peoples came to settle here.

Meanwhile, the Library of Congress has asked us to continue to do the work we have been doing, and to continue to use the term Indians for now, though many feel it is more than time to remove that term. Though they will almost certainly do so, LC has not yet decided the direction that it is going to go in the way of changing that language.

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Currently the funnel members are collaborating on various projects as well as working individually on headings that either come up in the material they catalog or the collections they work with. One collaboration is the heading to change Iroquois Indians to Haudenosaunee,

which is the preferred term of that tribal nation and what they call themselves. A small group worked on amending the scope notes in the headings Mestizo and Mestizaje, and these are currently under consideration at LC.

The African American funnel has reached out to us to collaborate in areas where our interests overlap. One example of this was their proposal for Afro-Latin Americans. This is still unresolved. Most recently we are thrashing out our feelings about the term Miscegenation which their funnel proposes changing to Miscegenation (Racism) and have been working on a shared document with our commentary to share with them and the Library of Congress when the heading comes up for consideration. The Judaica funnel has expressed an interest in working on this as well.

We have also brought up the idea of working on a proposal to change the B.C. and A.D. in dates to B.C.E. and C.E. This is currently in the works, and the Judaica funnel is collaborating on that project.

We are also discussing how to amend the headings representing Latin Americans and people of Latin American descent (who may speak French, Portuguese or English, as well as Indigenous languages) in the United States and elsewhere and distinguishing the term from Hispanic Americans, which indicates that the people spoken of descend from a place where Spanish is spoken, and therefore includes Spain, but does not include people from Brazil or certain other Latin Americans.

The activities I have spoken about all support LAIPA's vision for the future. These include addressing historical misrepresentations and increasing access to materials by providing cross-references and specific subject headings for areas that are not currently covered by an authorized heading. We hope to provide an outlet for self-representation of Indigenous voices. To understand the challenges and the broader goals of the funnel, it is important to look at the context. As the thesaurus most widely used in United States, the Library of Congress Subject Headings, contains hundreds of thousands of subject headings, that reflects the dominant culture and the times in which it was created. Therefore, the product is white, Christian, male, ableist, colonizer, heterosexual, and cis-gender in its perspective. We want to be part of the process of making LC subject headings more inclusive and more reflective of all the peoples it did not appropriately reflect as when it was originally created.

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Thank you! It was a pleasure to be with you today. Here is my contact information and a link to the LAIPA funnel.