

# *on cataloging ethics*

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*the whats's and  
the why's*

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*Working definition as of October 2020:*


“Principles and values that provide an intentional decision-making framework for those who work in cataloging or metadata positions”[3.1](#)

-- Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee

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*why talk  
about  
cataloging  
ethics?*

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- **Flawed and biased terminology is rampant**
  - **Attempts to codify cataloging ethics did not come to fruition until recently (2018)**
  - **How we catalog affects how materials are found**
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*why is  
there a  
need for  
codified  
cataloging  
ethics?*

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- ALA Code of Ethics is too generalized
  - Confronting our classification systems that are fraught with Anglo-centrism and bias
  - Challenging the perception of the library as a neutral entity
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*example of  
need for  
cataloging  
ethics*

Timeline of “illegal aliens” subject heading proposal for removal<sup>6.1</sup>

2014

- Dartmouth College students urge Dartmouth administration to drop “illegal” from any usage on campus, including the library catalog
- Students connect with librarians who put together proposal to replace “illegal aliens” with “undocumented immigrants” and “noncitizens”
- Library of Congress rejects proposal

2015

- Undeterred librarians gather support via Subject Analysis Committee and ALA Council, which ultimately votes to tell LC to change the heading

“illegal aliens”

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*example of  
need for  
cataloging  
ethics*

2016<sup>7.1</sup>

- LC relents and says it will remove “illegal aliens”
- Congresswoman Diane Black (R-TN) catches wind and introduces bill HR 4926 “Stopping Partisan Policy at the Library of Congress Act.”
- Ultimately House Republicans attach an amendment to another bill indicating that LC retain the headings and make their process of subject heading creation and revision more transparent
- LC has not commented on this subject heading since May 2016
- Heading remains unchanged to this day, but many libraries have implemented local usage of “undocumented immigrants” and “noncitizens’

”illegal aliens”

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*origin of  
radical  
cataloging*

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# *origin of radical cataloging*

- Codifying cataloging ethics is a natural outgrowth of the “radical cataloging” movement
  - The term “radical cataloging” originated in 2002 when K.R. Roberto started the listserv RADCAT in response to being told that politics were inappropriate to discuss on the infamous cataloging listserv AUTOCAT<sup>9.1</sup>
  - Roberto describes being a radical cataloger as someone who is “user-focused” and who knows “when and how to make cataloging decisions that may be in conflict with traditional cataloging standards”<sup>9.2</sup>
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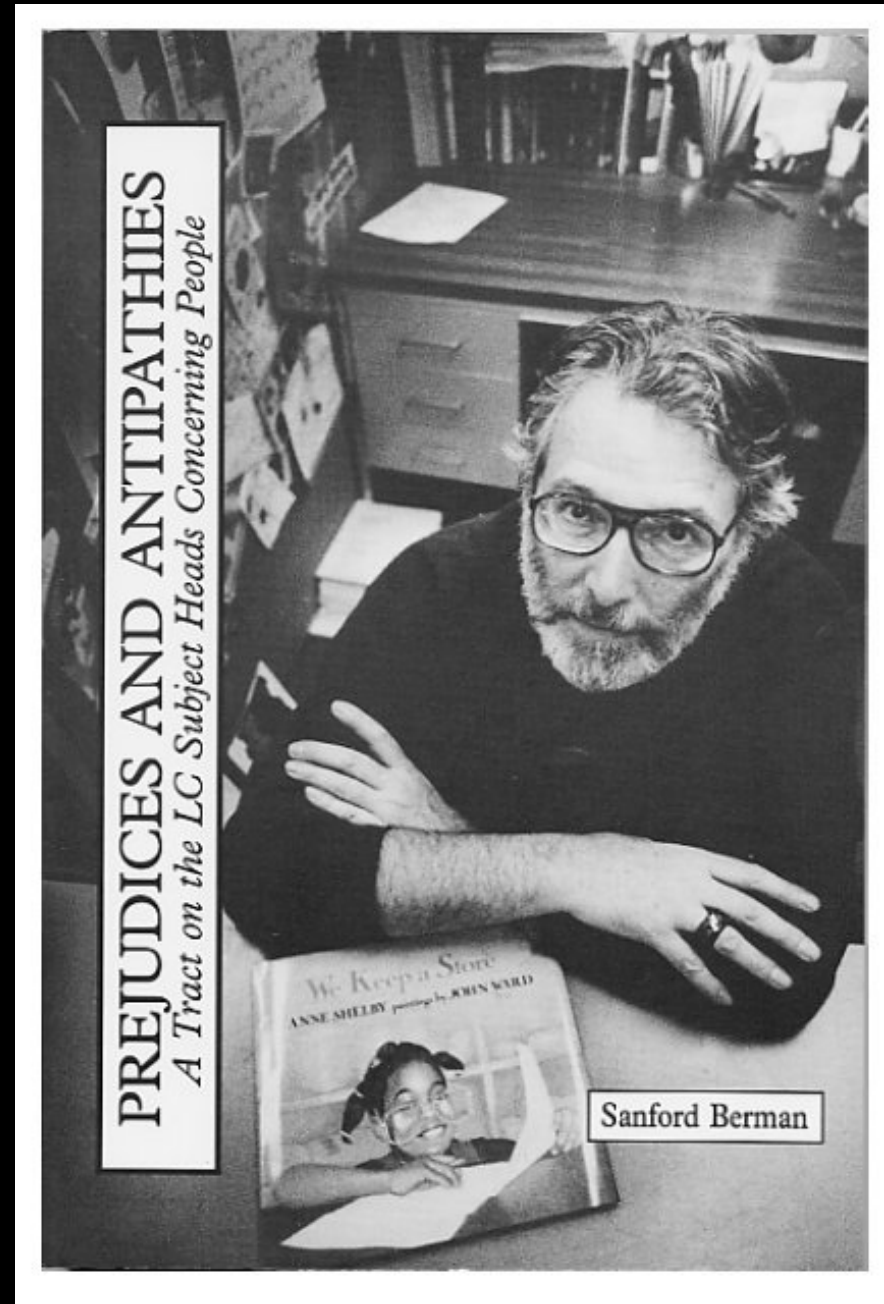
# *origin of radical cataloging*

Examples of inequities in library classification and subject analysis

- “God” as a subject heading with the intention of it representing Christianity's version of God
  - Offensive terminology
    - “Yellow peril”
    - “Illegal aliens”
  - Presumptive terminology
    - Astronauts, Women astronauts
    - Prostitutes, Male prostitutes
  - LCSH presumes that the subject heading is the most likely term “a reader” would look for – but *who* is this reader? [10.1](#)
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*origin of  
radical  
cataloging*

**Sanford Berman**



# *origin of radical cataloging*

Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Headings Concerning People

- Published in 1971 and was an innovative work on problematic LCSH and Berman's recommended solutions
- This revolutionary work was a result of Sandy's experience with working at a library in Zambia and the use of "kafirs" as a subject heading in reference to Black South Africans. Unlike in the US where "kafirs" was a neutral term, in Zambia, this word was akin to calling someone, well, you know....[12.1](#)

Sanford Berman

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# *origin of radical cataloging*

Tract divided into five parts:

- Races, Nationalities, Faiths, and Ethnic Groups
- Chauvinism, the "Bwana Syndrome," and the Third World
- Politics, Peace, Labor, Law Enforcement, etc.
- Man/Woman/Sex
- Children, Youth, "Idiots," and the "Underground"

Example from *Prejudices and Antipathies*<sup>13.1</sup>

**13. *Item:* NEGROES AS BUSINESSMEN  
[CONSUMERS, FARMERS, etc.], p. 886<sup>1</sup>**

The "as" necessarily implies that the occupation or activity that follows is somehow odd, uncommon, or unfitting for "Negroes" to engage in. The "proof of the pudding" is that no NEGROES AS SLAVES or NEGROES AS DOMESTIC SERVANTS is thought necessary.

***Remedy:*** Directly precede the occupation or activity with the adjectival form; e.g., AFRO-AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN [CONSUMERS, FARMERS, etc.].<sup>2</sup>

*origin of  
radical  
cataloging*

Sandy Berman, on if “colored” were  
kept in LCSH:

**“Why pamper the  
troglodytes?”[14.1](#)**

# *origin of radical cataloging*

**“*Prejudices and Antipathies* proved a harbinger of changes in *LCSH*. Of the 225 headings Berman suggested changes in, 88 (or 39%) have been changed almost exactly as he suggested, while an additional 54 (or 24%) have been changed in ways that partially reflect Berman’s suggestions.”[15.1](#)**

His work did not end there – Berman continued and continues to lobby Library of Congress with subject heading proposals. Scorecards of submitted headings and LC response are available online.[15.2](#)

*what could codified  
cataloging ethics  
look like?*

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*what could  
codified  
cataloging  
ethics look  
like?*

- **In 2005, Sheila Blair takes the work of predecessors and combines it all into a suggested 10 statement code specifically for catalogers**
- **She examines the various tasks of cataloging and identifies the ethical responsibilities that catalogers have for that specific task**
- **Let's look at it together!**



# Sheila Blair's Proposed Code of Cataloging Ethics

- I. We organize, add value to, and provide and maintain fair, equitable, and uncensored access to information for all local, national, and global library users, putting the information needs of our clients and the human right to freedom of information before our own needs and convenience.
  
  - II. To ensure that users find the information they need, catalogers gather and organize information and advise users in their choice of information by providing comprehensive, accurate encoding and access points; knowledgeable application and addition of subject headings and classification schemes; and accurate and complete description and notes.
  
  - III. We are vigilant in ensuring that we do not purposely or inadvertently “censor” or deny access to information by allowing cataloging backlogs or through inaccuracy, misuse, or nonuse of encoding, subject headings, classification schemes, and authority control.[18.1](#)
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## Sheila Blair's Proposed Code of Cataloging Ethics

- IV. We are honest and truthful in the representation of resources in regards to its subject area, the identity of those responsible for the intellectual content, and its accurate description.
  - V. We keep authority files up to date, accurately reflecting the intellectual efforts of authors. We avoid cultural bias and preserve cultural specificity in name headings.
  - VI. We contribute to the creation, development, reform, and fair, unbiased application of cataloging rules, standards, classifications, and information storage and retrieval systems. We avoid and work to reform cultural biases in standards for subject headings, classification schemes, and name authority control.[19.1](#)
  - VII. We provide accurate, full-level records to the shared databases, following the highest standards and rules for encoding, subject analysis, description, and classification.[19.2](#)
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# Sheila Blair's Proposed Code of Cataloging Ethics

- VIII. We are careful not to contribute to the misuse or distortion of information through inaccurate, careless, or minimal cataloging and resist all internal and external pressures to do so. We report and correct errors in the shared cooperative databases.
- IX. We do not blindly contribute original cataloging for resources for which we have no language or subject knowledge, but instead seek assistance. We carefully review copy-cataloging for errors before adding them to the local database.
- X. We commit ourselves to lifelong continuing education for the sake of the profession, our employers and clients, and the society we serve. We provide and seek to promote pre-job and on-the-job training and staff development opportunities for catalogers in languages, subject expertise, special formats and technical skills, and we work for required, comprehensive cataloging education in library schools.[20.1](#)
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*What could  
codified  
cataloging  
ethics look  
like?*

my observations

1. It doesn't read so much as a code of ethics but as a summary of the various tasks catalogers carry out
2. Doesn't explicitly offer guiding principles – it mentions “fair, unbiased” description but what is guiding that? The ALA Code of Ethics?
3. Too idealistic – backlogs being unethical struck me as a little extreme; budgetary and staffing constraints need to be taken into consideration!

# *What could codified cataloging ethics look like?*

## Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee

- Discussion began in ALA-affiliated cataloging groups ca. 2018
- Group is comprised of members representing United States, Canada, and United Kingdom
- In their mission statement, they indicate that the forthcoming Code of Ethics “will be a dynamic document embodying the collective experiences and wisdom of our community of practice and will consist of a framework, with guidance and examples of best practice, which can be shared across the cataloguing community.”[22.1](#)
- Second draft is currently available for public comment[22.2](#)

## Draft Cataloguing Code Of Ethics (Revised Sept. 2020)

- 1. We catalogue resources in our collections with the end-user in mind to facilitate access and promote discovery.**
  - 2. We bring our biases to the workplace. Therefore, we strive to overcome our personal, institutional, and societal limitations with empathy and respect for users, creators, and resources.**
  - 3. We recognise that interoperability and consistent application of standards help our users find and access materials. However, all standards are biased; we will approach them critically to make cataloguing more inclusive.**
  - 4. We support efforts to make standards and tools financially, intellectually, and technologically accessible to all cataloguers, and developed with evidence-based research and stakeholder input.**
  - 5. We aspire to be responsible cataloguers. Individual discretion is inherent in cataloguing; therefore, we will take responsibility for our decisions and be transparent with our actions, standards, and policies.[23.1](#)**
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6. We commit to collaborating widely to support the creation, distribution, maintenance, and enrichment of metadata in various environments and jurisdictions.
  7. We insist on diversity and equality in the workplace. We promote the education, training, equitable pay, and fair work environment of everyone who catalogues so that they can continue to support search and discovery.
  8. We advocate for the value of cataloguing work within our organisations and with external partners.
  9. We work with our user communities to understand their needs in order to provide relevant and timely services. [24.1](#)
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# *What could codified cataloging ethics look like?*

my observations

1. While more broad, draft code addresses concerns and principles that we've seen through cataloging history
2. Focus on responsibility – acknowledging bias and striving to overcome, taking responsibility for specific cataloging decisions
3. Acknowledges not all cataloging departments are created equal (making resources financially available and accessible, e.g. RDA ain't cheap)

*ethical  
cataloging  
dilemmas*

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# *ethical cataloging dilemmas*

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Inherent bias in subject heading

So you're cataloging a magazine, let's say *High Times* for example, where you see "drug abuse" in the catalog record

- Drug abuse is the preferred term for "drug use" in LCSH
- Magazine in question is clearly directed to the recreational set
- Options?
  - a) accept as-is and trust judgment of original cataloger?
  - b) keep heading but find a suitable heading to add?
  - c) replace heading with suitable heading?
  - d) remove heading entirely?

# *ethical cataloging dilemmas*

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perpetuating bias through subject headings (or, race as access)

I cataloged “A Player’s Funeral” about 5 or 6 years ago. Here is an excerpt from the description:

- ""Terrell Bates also known as Tuff, was what you would call a real player. At a very young age, he was a very attractive young man that has been messing with a lot of girls. Once he was murdered while sleeping with another man's girlfriend, his family and friends went crazy trying to find his killer. After finding and killing the only one who they were sure who did it, everyone prepared for the funeral. While at this dramatic funeral filled with Tuff's family, friends, and girls that Tuff had slept with. A lot of people learned more about who Tuff really was. Over Tuff's dead body, the guilty conscious of the real murder came out and told what really happened to Tuff."–Publisher's description.


Stuck on subject headings, I used some subjects with “African American” – I distinctly recall confirming that yes, Tuff is Black; however, there was nothing in the bib record indicating that!

# *ethical cataloging dilemmas*

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Catalog maintenance for locally applied headings

So in the case of “illegal aliens,” many libraries have opted to strip it from their catalog, but there are considerations to make:

- Is the catalog within a consortia? How are these decisions made for the group?
  - Would removing be undone by mass updates or shared content management (e.g. Alma Community Zone)?
  - How does the cataloger plan to maintain local authority control? Are there resources/time to maintain local decisions?
  - If removing and not replacing a subject heading, can that process be automated?
  - Are these decisions documented?
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*My personal working definition as of November 2020:*

“Cultivating a collaborative environment that facilitates intentional and empathic consideration of bibliographic description, subject analysis, and emerging methods of metadata application to ensure inclusive access”

-- Shay Beezley

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# References

(click number to return to original slide)

[3.1](#) Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee  
<https://sites.google.com/view/cataloging-ethics/home/cataloging-ethics-definition?authuser=0>

[6.1](#) & [7.1](#) Timeline of “Illegal Aliens” Subject Heading Change Petition  
[https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=lrs\\_facpubs](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=lrs_facpubs)

[9.1](#) page 1, “Preface: What Does Radical Cataloging Mean Anyway?” (Radical cataloging : essays at the front / eds. KR Roberto and Sanford Berman. ISBN 9780786435432)

[9.2](#) page 2, ibid

[10.1](#) page 124, Three Decades Since *Prejudices and Antipathies*: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings / Steven A. Knowlton  
<https://www.sanfordberman.org/biblinks/knowlton.pdf>

[12.1](#) Sandy Berman’s Last Stand  
<https://www.sanfordberman.org/cityp/ber3t.htm>

[13.1](#) page 49, 1993 edition of *Prejudices and Antipathies*

[14.1](#) page 45, 1993 edition of *Prejudices and Antipathies*

[15.1](#) pages 127-128, Three Decades Since *Prejudices and Antipathies*: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings / Steven A. Knowlton  
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[15.2](#) <http://www.sanfordberman.org>

[18.1](#) & [19.1](#) page 16, Toward a code of cataloging ethics  
[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library\\_pubs/11/](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library_pubs/11/)

[19.2](#) & [20.1](#) page 17, Toward a code of cataloging ethics  
[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library\\_pubs/11/](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/library_pubs/11/)

[22.1](#) Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee Mission Statement  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LDwDu0xHUtyYTY1B\\_Rilhsu6SKN1LvRNmvLn09-UUno/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LDwDu0xHUtyYTY1B_Rilhsu6SKN1LvRNmvLn09-UUno/edit)

[22.2](#), [23.1](#), & [24.1](#) Second Draft of Proposed Code  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tnTetySv6mgCa4RfScaffykQdtViZZ8M5nwgowZboQk/edit>

# Suggested Reading & Resources

**The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries** / Hope Olson. 978-9048160846 (originally published in 2002; reprint 2011; currently out of print)

**Queering the Catalog** / Emily Drabinski. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*. Vol. 83, No. 2 (April 2013), pp. 94-111 (18 pages). Published By: The University of Chicago Press. DOI: 10.1086/669547

**Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front** / edited by KR Roberto, introduction by Sanford Berman.

**On Equal Terms: A Thesaurus for Nonsexist Indexing and Cataloging**. Joan Marshall. 978-0918212023 (originally published in 1977)

**Cataloging Lab** <https://cataloginglab.org>

**Cataloging Ethics Bibliography**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bHtghhSL54PF1ekIwnmHpF90\\_2KR\\_GMq5GWIBgNLKDg/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bHtghhSL54PF1ekIwnmHpF90_2KR_GMq5GWIBgNLKDg/edit)

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