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Recommended Citation

Jill Baron, Tina Gross, & Óscar Rubén Cornejo Cásaes (2016) Cataloging News: Timeline of “Illegal Aliens” Subject Heading Change Petition, *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*,54:7, 506-509, DOI: 10.1080/01639374.2016.1218707

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Timeline of “Illegal Aliens” subject heading change petition

(forthcoming in news section of Cataloging & Classification Quarterly)

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7/7/15

January 22, 2014: Founding of the student organization CoFIREd, or the Dartmouth Coalition for Immigration Reform, Equality and DREAMERs, by Eduardo M. Najera Ortega (Class of 2014) & Oscar R. Cornejo Casares (Class of 2017). One of the first outreach efforts of this organization is the “Drop the I-Word” campaign at Dartmouth.

February 2014: Melissa Padilla (Class of 2017) meets with librarian Jill Baron for research assistance and discovers subject heading “illegal aliens” attached to records for titles of interest as they peruse the library’s online catalog. Upset by this finding, she shares this information with fellow CoFIREd members.

February 24, 2014: Student activists at Dartmouth release a document called the “Freedom Budget” that lists specific demands of the college administration for a more inclusive campus.¹ One provision, included by CoFIREd, aims directly at Dartmouth Library: “The library search catalog system shall use undocumented instead of ‘illegal’ in reference to immigrants.” This demand is the result of the discovery of the “illegal aliens” subject heading during Padilla’s research.

March 5, 2014: Baron and colleague Amy Witzel meet with CoFIREd students to discuss the subject heading, the larger context of the classification system, and possible action items.

March 18, 2014: After urging from Baron and Witzel, the Dartmouth Library administration responds to demand, inviting students to join the library in making a formal proposal to LC to change the subject heading.

March 24, 2014: Librarians Baron, Witzel, John DeSantis and Eliz Kirk meet with CoFIREd students and faculty and administration allies to discuss formulating a subject heading change proposal, including gathering evidence to support the change.

July 2014: DeSantis submits proposals for changing five separate subject headings to the Library of Congress via Dartmouth’s participation in the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO). These headings include the following:

¹<https://www.scribd.com/document/208843285/The-Plan-for-Dartmouth-s-Freedom-Budget-Items-for-Transformative-Justice-at-Dartmouth>

existing term	proposed term
Illegal aliens	Undocumented immigrants
Illegal aliens in literature	Undocumented immigrants in literature
Illegal alien children	Undocumented immigrant children
Children of illegal aliens	Children of undocumented immigrants
Women illegal aliens	Undocumented women immigrants

December 15, 2014: Library of Congress provides its response, under *Undocumented immigrants [and five related proposals]*, rejecting the proposals: “Illegal aliens is an inherently legal heading, and as such the preference is to use the legal terminology.”²

June 15, 2015: Tina Gross, member the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS) Cataloging and Metadata Management Section’s (CaMMS) Subject Analysis Committee, connects with DeSantis to discuss the rejection of the proposal and possible next steps.

June 29, 2015: At its meeting at American Library Association (ALA) Annual in San Francisco, CA, the Subject Analysis Committee agrees to review the subject heading “Illegal aliens” and consider making a recommendation to LC.

January 8-12, 2016: At ALA Midwinter in Boston, MA, Gross submits Resolution on Replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading “Illegal Aliens” with “Undocumented Immigrants” written in collaboration with others (and with input from Sandy Berman), to the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), which votes to bring the resolution forward for consideration by ALA Council. Members of the National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, or REFORMA, the Ethnic & Multicultural Exchange Round Table (EMIERT), and the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM) help spread the word and garner support. The resolution is also supported by the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT), and the Subject Analysis Committee. The Resolution passed ALA Council nearly unanimously.

At its meeting at ALA Midwinter in Boston, the Subject Analysis Committee discusses the subject heading “Illegal aliens,” and votes to form a working group to investigate the matter further. Gross is appointed chair of the working group.

² <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsod/psd-141215.html>

March 22, 2016: Library of Congress announces that “in response to constituent requests,” it will discontinue the “illegal aliens” subject heading, replacing it with two headings, Noncitizens and Unauthorized immigration. (<https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/illegal-aliens-decision.pdf>)

April 2016: Congressman Diane Black (R-TN) introduces the bill HR 4926 “Stopping Partisan Policy at the Library of Congress Act.”

April 28, 2016: ALA President Sari Feldman and ALCTS President Norm Medeiros send a letter to members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, urging them to remove language from the spending bill that would regulate the Library of Congress’ actions with this subject heading change.³

May 2016: Republicans on the House Appropriations Subcommittee, seizing upon Black’s bill, attach a provision to the annual spending bill for the Legislative Branch: ““To the extent practical, the committee instructs the library to maintain certain subject headings that reflect terminology used in [Title 8](#) of the United States code.” House democrats such as Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL) and Joaquin Castro (D-TX) seek to amend the bill to remove this language, but lose in a 25-24 vote.

May 19, 2016: Letter signed by Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), Congressman John Culberson (R-TX), Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) and Congressman Lamar Smith (R-TX) urging the Library of Congress to “revoke the subject heading cancellations,” and referring to the “Orwellian trajectory” of the subject heading revision.

May 20, 2016: Library of Congress releases Tentative List 1606a,⁴ which details the subject heading changes indicated on March 22 and invites public feedback about the changes via an online survey.

June 26, 2016: At ALA Annual in Orlando, FL, the ALA Council passes “Resolution in Support of the Professional Cataloging Processes and Determinations of the Library of Congress” supporting Library of Congress against interference from Congress.⁵

The Subject Analysis Committee votes to approve the draft report of the Subject Analysis Committee Working Group on the Library of Congress subject heading “Illegal aliens” in principle (with a few additions/clarifications to be completed by 7/13).⁶ The report concurs with the Library of Congress decision to change “Aliens” to “Noncitizens,” but recommends that “Illegal aliens” be replaced with “Undocumented immigrants” where appropriate, with more specific terms assigned in cases where the subject heading “Illegal aliens” was assigned to works about nonimmigrants.

³ <http://tinyurl.com/hp3xgsq>

⁴ <https://classificationweb.net/tentative-subjects/1606a.html>

⁵

http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/cd_39_resol_in_suppt_lib_of_cong_62116_rd.docx

⁶ <http://connect.ala.org/node/255185>