

*Article*

# Classification along the Color Line: Excavating Racism in the Stacks

Melissa Adler

## ABSTRACT

This paper contends that systemic violence is fundamentally a classification problem. The interrogation of the production of racialized library subjects in relation to one another and in relation to political and social conditions may shed light on the intensely complex problems of racism in the United States today. I discuss the ways that sections of library classifications were constructed based on ideas about African Americans in relation to American social and political agendas. My claim is that the structures that were written in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are deeply embedded in our libraries and have participated in the naturalization of certain racialized assumptions and associations. In the 21st century we continue to maintain, apply, and refine a flawed structure. My aim is to provide a window into how epistemic violence affects American consciousness about race by revealing some of the ways that our library classifications have been woven together by men who cited and informed one another and ultimately, organized and universalized American history. These classifications are structured around assertions about timeless and fixed national values constructed out of progressive conceptualizations of the nation and its citizenry. A reliance on racial exclusion was necessary for this grand narrative, and scientific theories and classifications provided legitimacy and fuel for racist programs. One of key ways that exclusion was legitimated and supported was through the application of evolutionary theory and principles. Social engineering, white supremacy, and conquest were justified and propelled by beliefs in the evolutionary superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. It is not by accident that these ideas became foundational to classificatory practice in libraries. In fact, Thomas Dousa has drawn attention to the intellectual climate in which late 19th century library classificationists worked—particularly, the theories and classifications of the sciences and nature as devised by Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Charles

Adler, Melissa. "Classification along the Color Line: Excavating Racism in the Stacks." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017). DOI: [10.24242/jclis.v1i1.17](https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i1.17).

ISSN: 2572-1364

Darwin—and argues that these ideas and systems inspired the introduction of evolutionary principles into bibliographic classifications. The present paper is in agreement with Dousa's claim and argues that such a conclusion carries critical implications for understanding libraries' classifications of race and ethnicity. Emphasis is placed on the legacy of the classification of books about people of African descent as variously named and conceptualized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The last section of the paper examines the performativity of classifications to examine some of the processes by which racism has become systemic on library shelves.

I saw that what divided me from the world was not anything intrinsic to us but the actual injury done by people intent on naming us, intent on believing that what they have named us matters more than anything we could ever actually do.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 2015

## INTRODUCTION

1876 was one of the most important years in the history of the librarianship in the United States. The American Library Association and *Library Journal* were established, Melvil Dewey published his *Decimal Classification*, and Charles Cutter produced his *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog*. 1876 is also regarded as the year that Reconstruction met its end with the controversial election of Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican from Ohio, to the office of the U.S. presidency. Hayes would soon remove federal troops from the American South, thereby securing control of the South by white supremacist Democrats, who restricted civic and political participation of African Americans through voter registration policies, disenfranchisement, and segregation.<sup>1</sup> I take these events of 1876 to be anything but coincidental, and look to this moment in history to enter into a discussion of the treatment of race in library knowledge organization systems. Indeed, the social and political milieu out of which library classifications arose was intrinsic to the theoretical principles upon which they were established. I contend that systemic violence is fundamentally a classification problem, and that an investigation into the production of racialized library subjects in relation to one another and in relation to political and social conditions may shed light on the intensely complex problems of contemporary racism.

This project is akin to efforts toward economic reparations. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his 2014 “Case for Reparations,” argues that policy makers need to discuss the possibilities for reparations for the lasting effects of discriminatory policies that have been imposed on African Americans.<sup>2</sup> Coates focuses on the legacy of a set of policies known as redlining, which started with 1930s federal housing policy and has been reinforced by banks, private investors, and insurance companies. According to Coates, a wealth gap was engineered based on segregationist logic, which drew red zones into maps to facilitate and legitimate discriminatory renting, lending, and housing practices.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* (June 2014), available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

<sup>3</sup> Also see: Thomas M. Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Not only do those practices continue today, but the effect is an amplification of the processes that allow the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. One reason it is so hard to address this kind of inequality is because the classificatory lines upon which the discriminatory infrastructures were constructed have become naturalized and embedded over time.

Working from a similar position, my findings are offered as support for a case for taxonomic reparations.<sup>4</sup> I would like to suggest that similar processes are at work on library shelves, and in fact, that the lines that divide and distribute information are directly tied to economic and social policy. Indeed, the divisions inscribed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century extend to the knowledge organization technologies of today. For example, as I write, I am also reading about the Google image search for “three black teenagers” that retrieves multiple mugshots, compared to the search for “three white teenagers,” which retrieved sporty, happy faces. Google has denied that they are responsible for these differences, claiming that the search results are the product of user behavior and demand. In other words, the claim is that society is racist, not Google. Safiya Noble, however, asserts that Google can and should be held accountable for its algorithms.<sup>5</sup> The intervention I am making is to suggest that these search results can be explained, at least in part, as products of a long history of installing and embedding categories into information retrieval systems in ways that make them incredibly difficult to undo. Google’s algorithms operate by way of categories, in ways that are fundamentally connected to the categories that organize library catalogs, shelf arrangements, and databases. The function of these categories in the lives of information seekers derives from the fact that the systems become deeply entangled with society, even while they’re mostly hidden from view. I read the classifications that order books on library shelves in the context from which they were written, as part of a much larger project at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in writing a master narrative about the United States and regulating populations through documentation and classification. Those classifications provide insights into the discursive processes that continue to contribute to broader, systemic disenfranchisement.

---

<sup>4</sup> See also Melissa Adler, “The Case for Taxonomic Reparations,” *Knowledge Organization*, 43, no. 8 (2016): 630-640.

<sup>5</sup> Jessica Guynn, “‘Three Black Teenagers’ Google Search Sparks Outrage,” *USA Today* (10 June, 2016), accessed 12 June, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/06/09/google-image-search-three-black-teenagers-three-white-teenagers/85648838/>. Noble’s work on commercialized search engines and looking for “black girls” online reveals that racist and gendered assumptions are still very much part of indexing technologies. Safiya U. Noble, “Google Search: Hyper-visibility as a Means of Rendering Black Women and Girls Invisible,” *InVisible Culture* 19 (2013), <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/google-search-hyper-visibility-as-a-means-of-rendering-black-women-and-girls-invisible/>

Below I discuss the ways that sections of library classifications were constructed based on ideas about African Americans in relation to American social and political agendas. My claim is that the structures that were written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are deeply embedded in our libraries and have participated in the naturalization of certain racialized assumptions and associations. My aim is to provide a window into how epistemic violence affects American consciousness about race by revealing some of the ways that our library classifications have been woven together by a group of men who cited and informed one another and ultimately, organized and universalized American history. These classifications are structured around assertions about timeless and fixed national values constructed out of progressive conceptualizations of the nation and its citizenry. The last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of bureaucracy, technoscience, social science, industrialization, and librarianship, as well as the wrenching consequences of the failures of Reconstruction and strivings of U.S. policy-makers toward a unified national identity. Classification was essential to all of these projects, and the arrangement of books and knowledge into racial, ethnic, and religious categories mirrored efforts toward social control nationwide.<sup>6</sup> A reliance on racial exclusion was necessary for this grand narrative, and scientific theories and classifications provided legitimacy and fuel for racist programs. The universalization of whiteness and the marking of nonwhite as exceptions to an assumed rule have, in fact, perpetuated the invisibility and dominance of whiteness.<sup>7</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we continue to maintain, apply, and refine flawed classificatory structures based on an “artificial consensus made possible by white supremacy.”<sup>8</sup>

One of key ways that exclusion was legitimated and supported was through the application of evolutionary theory and principles. Beliefs in the evolutionary superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race fueled and justified projects in social engineering, white

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1967). Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Todd Honma has presented an excellent case for excavating racism in the LIS professions and LIS education: Todd Honma, “Trippin’ Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies,” *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2005). For studies on how racialized subjects are treated as “other” see Hope A. Olson, “The Ubiquitous Hierarchy: An Army to Overcome the Threat of a Mob,” *Library Trends* 52, no.3 (2004): 604-616; Hope A. Olson, “The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs,” *Signs* 26, no. 3 (2001): 639-668; Hope A. Olson, Mapping Beyond Dewey’s Boundaries: Constructing Classificatory Space for Marginalized Knowledge Domains, *Library Trends*, 47, no. 2 (1998): 233-254.

<sup>8</sup> Mason B. Williams, “The Crumbling Monuments of the Age of Marble,” *The Atlantic*, 5 December, 2015, accessed 7 December, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/warnings-from-the-age-of-marble/419004/>

supremacy, and conquest. It is not by accident that these ideas became foundational to classificatory practice in libraries. In fact, Thomas Dousa has drawn attention to the intellectual climate in which late 19<sup>th</sup> century library classificationists worked—particularly, the theories and classifications of the sciences and nature as devised by Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Darwin—and argues that these ideas and systems inspired the introduction of evolutionary principles into bibliographic classifications.<sup>9</sup> I accept and work from Dousa’s claim to argue that such a conclusion carries critical implications for understanding libraries’ classifications of race and ethnicity.

I do not wish to attribute problems of systemic racism to individuals, as that effaces the extent to which racism is institutionalized across agencies, organizations, and individuals in society. I take care not to attach intention to individuals who have not explicitly stated their motivations. I use the examples of individuals and their systems to provide insights into the intellectual climate of the period and how certain forms of thinking contributed to our present-day knowledge structures. Emphasis is placed on the legacy of the classification of books about people of African descent as conceptualized and organized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### CHARLES CUTTER, *EXPANSIVE CLASSIFICATION*

At the center of this study is Charles Cutter, as he is a key figure who introduced evolutionary principles to library classifications.<sup>10</sup> Although his subject system is not used in practice today, except for a few special collections, his classificatory principles are among the most highly influential and lasting in the field.<sup>11</sup> In 1876 Cutter issued the foundational *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* as Part II of the U.S. Bureau of Education’s “Special Report on Public Libraries.” The focus here is on his *Expansive Classification*, which remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1903, but served as a model for other systems, including the Library of Congress Classification. Cutter’s library career began at Harvard Divinity School while he was still a student, and along with Librarian Ezra Abbot, he developed a cataloging code and rearranged the Harvard College Library into broad subject categories.<sup>12</sup> He worked at Harvard until 1868, and then was Librarian

---

<sup>9</sup> Thomas M. Dousa, "Evolutionary Order in the Classification Theories of CA Cutter and EC Richardson: Its Nature and Limits," *NASKO* 2, no. 1 (2011): 76.

<sup>10</sup> Dousa, "Evolutionary Order."

<sup>11</sup> The best example is the Forbes Library, where Cutter devised his Expansive Classification. A guide to the catalog is available online: <http://forbeslibrary.org/help/find-books/>

<sup>12</sup> Francis L. Miksa, "Charles Ammi Cutter: Nineteenth-century Systematizer of Libraries" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1974), 43-82, esp. 59. Also see Charles A. Cutter, "The New Catalogue of Harvard College Library," *The North American Review* 108, no. 222 (1869): 96-129; John Fiske, "A Librarian’s Work," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 38 (October 1876): 480-91.

at the Boston Athenaeum, where he wrote the *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog*, and devised the *Expansive Classification*. He then began working at the Forbes Library in Northampton in 1893 and continued to work on the *Expansive Classification* until his death.

The *Expansive Classification* eventually included seven versions, each more specific than the previous.<sup>13</sup> This way the smallest libraries would be allowed to use the simplest and most general of classifications, and larger libraries could use the more complex versions. Small libraries would simply divide their collections into eight sections, without subdividing them, and then arrange titles alphabetically by the author's last name, very much like bookstores of the present. The classification could expand with the growth of a collection. The seventh version – the most complete and divided expansion – was designed for libraries that held more than 150,000 volumes.

The evolutionary principle was one aspect of the classification upon which Cutter claimed the superiority of the *Expansive Classification* over Dewey's decimal system.<sup>14</sup> Cutter's system also reveals a great deal about the evolutionary approaches and attitudes toward race. For example, the 1902 edition of the seventh expansion classifies "Negroes" in three locations: ethnology (PY) in the Anthropology section; and education of special classes and slave labor, both in the Social Sciences. Another class—F8339, defined as "Slavery controversy," was shelved in American history but did not name a racial category. The application of evolutionary principles outside of the natural sciences proved to be a challenge for Cutter, but he maintained his belief in the advantages of those principles as a framework across the classification.

## Anthropology

First, let us look at the Anthropology section in the seventh expansion, as that provides the clearest evidence of evolutionary theories as they applied to race and ethnicity. It should be noted that the sections on Zoology and Anthropology were written by Richard Bliss, librarian at Redwood Library in Newport Rhode Island (not to be confused with Henry Bliss, who created the Bliss Classification). Bliss worked closely with Cutter in the development of other areas of the scheme, as well.

The broader P division was defined as "Vertebrata (Craniata)," which appears to have been hierarchically equivalent to Anthropology (Pw) within the discipline of Zoology. Anthropology was understood to be a biological science of human evolution, race, and culture. It was treated as if it was a branch of Zoology, and the range within included classes on topics like Anthropometry and Somatology, which served to organize and secure biological explanations of racial difference.

---

<sup>13</sup> C. A. Cutter's *Expansive Classification* (1902), available in full text via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100184493>

<sup>14</sup> Dousa, "Evolutionary Order," 81.

<b>O</b>	<b>Zoology</b>
	<b>Invertebrates</b>
<b>P</b>	<b>Vertebrates</b>
<b>Pg</b>	<b>Mammals</b>
<b>Pw</b>	<b>Anthropology, Ethnology, Ethnography</b>

**Figure 1.** Cutter’s Expansive Classification at O-Pw, 1902

The PY section was specifically concerned with Ethnology—the branch of Anthropology that deals with race and ethnicity. It was organized into a variety of subdivisions, driven in part by the theoretical scheme on which classifications of race and ethnicity were based. For example, the subclass PYE provides a meta-taxonomy for “Ethnography (Races of men),” indicating that race can be determined in all of these different ways: “Somatological (physical) grouping,” “Geographical grouping,” “Linguistic grouping,” “By institutions and social organization,” “By arts and culture,” “By musical systems,” and “By mythology and religion.” Next is PYF- PYG (part of the section is shown in Figure 2), which provides a lengthy arrangement of “Ethnic groups.” Listed first is the “Negroid type (Black race),” followed by the “Mongolian type (Yellow race),” the “American (Red race),” and finally the “Caucasic (White race).” Later in the PY hierarchy is PYR, which provides a taxonomy of “Social evolution.” PYY divides “Race (social) psychology” into narrower topics such as “Mental descent,” which includes the subtopics “Race experience,” “Selection,” and “Adaptation.”



PYF	Ethnic groups
PYG	Negroid type. ( <i>Black race</i> )
PYGA	Negroes
PYGB	Sudanese Nubians
PYGF	Bantus
PYGH	Negrillos (Pygmies)
PYGI	Bushmen
PYK	Hottentots
PYGM	Melanesians (Oceanic negroes)

**Figure 2.** Cutter’s Expansive Classification at PYF-PYG, 1902

### Social Science and Education

The Social Science section of the seventh expansion encompassed economics, sociology, education, and law. In a lengthy defense of Cutter’s “natural” system, Richard Bliss described the logic of the order of the Social and Political Sciences— “topics not usually considered susceptible to a natural and systematic arrangement.”<sup>15</sup> His description reveals the ways that evolutionary principles were applied to fields outside of the natural sciences. After first explaining the general categories, he states that the divisions of Political Economy “show a gradual progression closely corresponding to a natural transition of the subjects themselves.” Bliss goes to great lengths to explain his logic:

With the acquisition of property there will always be found a class of persons who never possess, or cannot keep, property, namely, the Poor, which is the next main subdivision in Mr. Cutter’s list. This is of course closely connected with Public Morals, the next topic, which naturally leads to the subject Education and culture. The succeeding division, Woman, which requires a

---

<sup>15</sup> Richard Bliss, “Report on Classification,” *Library Journal*, 14, no. 1-2 (1889): 243.

special method of treatment, fitly stands by itself as the crowning result of education, and a connecting link between man considered socially and man considered politically.<sup>16</sup>

He does not include the placement of “Negroes” in his description of this section, but one can infer enough about the presumed “natural order” from the description above and the arrangement shown in Figure 3. “Negroes, Freedmen” was classed at IZ within education, along with a range of other marginalized populations. Note that this is at the very far end of the classification, distinct from IK-IY—classes devoted to topics related to education (pedagogy, school subjects, grade levels, etc.) for an assumed white, “able-bodied,” male, propertied American population.

<b>Classes of persons</b>	
<b>IZA</b>	<b>Blind and Deaf and dumb</b>
<b>IZB</b>	<b>Blind</b>
<b>IZC</b>	<b>Books for the Blind</b>
<b>IZD</b>	<b>Deaf and dumb</b>
<b>IZF</b>	<b>Feeble-minded</b>
<b>IZI</b>	<b>Indians</b>
<b>IZK</b>	<b>Criminals</b>
<b>IZN</b>	<b>Negroes, Freedmen</b>
<b>IZP</b>	<b>Poor, The</b>
<b>IZW</b>	<b>Women, Female education, Sex in education</b>
	<b>Better in Kwz</b>

**Figure 3.** Cutter Expansive Classification at IZ

Relatedly, works on “Slavery in the U.S.” were classed in the HI section as a category within labor and production. HIN was a subclass within that grouping, defined as “Freedmen and free negroes in the U.S.” One concludes that, according to the Cutter system, African Americans were objects of study and interest insofar as they informed commerce, theories of race and social evolution, and a narrowly defined conceptualization of public morality.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## JOHN FISKE, “A LIBRARIAN’S WORK”

Although he is virtually unknown to most librarians today, John Fiske, Assistant Librarian at Harvard, helped to plan the first meeting of the American Library Association and served on the editorial board for *Library Journal* in its first two years.<sup>17</sup> It seems he was an influential figure in the development of evolution-based classifications in libraries. Dousa speculates that Cutter’s “collaboration with Bliss, as well as his acquaintance with John Fiske, the well-known popularizer of Spencer’s philosophy, may well have encouraged him to adopt evolutionary order as the official principle for the EC [Expansive Classification].”<sup>18</sup> Fiske’s essay, “A Librarian’s Work,” was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in October of 1876, to inform the American public about the significance and demands of library work, particularly with regard to the catalog. It has been reprinted in a variety of library publications, as a reminder of our professional origins and the timeless necessity of cataloging.<sup>19</sup> As such the piece should be regarded as instrumental in the professionalization literature.<sup>20</sup> Fiske’s library career was fairly short – 1872 until 1879. In 1877, when Justin Winsor became Librarian at Harvard, Fiske felt his own position was rendered superfluous. He pursued a lecture tour opportunity, and soon resigned from the library. The lectures would be turned into books, and he built a career for which he became renowned out of writing history, philosophy, and textbooks.

Historians now regard Fiske as a “leading pop-evolutionary thinker” in the U.S. for his advancement of scientific racism.<sup>21</sup> Fiske met and corresponded with Darwin and regarded Thomas Huxley as a friend. He even dedicated a collection of essays on Darwinism, which included “A Librarian’s Work,” to Huxley. During his tenure at Harvard, Fiske reorganized and reclassified the American Room, an experience about which he wrote in his 1891 book on the American Revolution:

---

<sup>17</sup> Edward G. Holley, *Raking the Historic Coals: The A.L.A. Scrapbook of 1876* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1967), 54, 91; *Library Journal*, 1, 2 (1876, 1877)

<sup>18</sup> Dousa, “Evolutionary Order,” 81.

<sup>19</sup> “A Librarian’s Work,” in Rory Litwin, *Library Daylight: Tracings of Modern Librarianship, 1874-1922* (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2006), 17-34; David S. Pena, *Journal of Access Services* 5, no. 3 (2008): 441-458; Leonard Schlup, Stephen H. Paschen, *Librarianship in Gilded Age America: An Anthology of Writings, 1868-1901* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 25-37 (in that volume the piece is titled “The Work of Librarians.”)

<sup>20</sup> It was not uncommon for librarians to publish in popular magazines at this time. For example, the *Nation* printed Charles Cutter’s announcement of the first library convention on 27 July 1876. Fiske wrote a regular column for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and between 1867 and 1901, he contributed over sixty articles.

<sup>21</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 99.

In the course of my work as Assistant Librarian of Harvard University in 1872 and the next few years, I had occasion to overhaul what was called the 'American Room,' and to superintend, or revise, the cataloguing of some twenty thousand volumes and pamphlets relating to America. In the course of this work my attention was called more and more to sundry problems and speculations connected with the transplanted of European communities to American soil, their development under new conditions, and the effect of all this upon the general progress of civilization. The study of aboriginal America itself had already presented to me many other interesting problems in connection with primitive culture.<sup>22</sup>

He most likely would have cataloged the American Room according to the scheme that included a subject index developed just over a decade earlier by Ezra Abbot and Charles Cutter.<sup>23</sup> The categories were quite general, but after librarians reclassified the collection, beginning in 1878, a printed index to subjects indicated that books about slavery were shelved in sociology, and books on "Negroes" were shelved in U.S. history.<sup>24</sup>

Fiske's library work informed and was informed by his historical and philosophical scholarship and his political endeavors. While he was librarian at Harvard he was also writing his two-volume *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy, Based on the Doctrine of Evolution*, in which he presented a complete ontological theory of the universe. He later authored a textbook on American history, in which he classed Native Americans into three groups according to social evolutionary theories. In that text, he offers questions for teachers to pose to schoolchildren for classroom discussion and exercises: 1) "What is a native? What is a foreigner? What is a citizen? What is an alien? Can one be a native and a foreigner at the same time?" 2) "Imagine an Indian passing from a savage to a civilized state. When does he cease to be savage? To be barbarous? To be half-civilized?"<sup>25</sup> One sees all-too clearly the influence of evolutionary theory in his conceptualization of populations passing through increasingly "civilized" stages of development. In that textbook, Fiske refers to the "negro race" as the "innocent cause" of the civil war, as if slaves were responsible for their own bondage and the Confederate

---

<sup>22</sup> John Fiske, *The American Revolution*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1896), ix. For a biographical sketch see Lawrence Clark Powell, "John Fiske—Bookman," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 35, no. 4 (1941): 221-254.

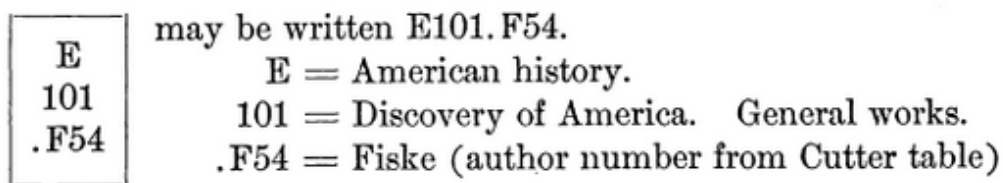
<sup>23</sup> See Miksa, "Charles Ammi Cutter," 59-61; Cutter, "The New Catalogue of Harvard College Library."

<sup>24</sup> William Coolidge Lane, *An Index Guide to the Classification of the Harvard College Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1905), available at <https://archive.org/details/indexguidetoshel00harvrich>

<sup>25</sup> John Fiske, *A History of the United States: For Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 16.

States' will to fight for slavery.<sup>26</sup> Published by Houghton Mifflin in thirteen different editions, the textbook was widely used in schools. Fiske would later write, "the conquest of the North American continent by men of the English race was unquestionably the most prodigious event in the political history of mankind."<sup>27</sup> He was also a founding member of the Immigration Restriction League, which proposed bills before Congress to limit numbers of people from Eastern and Central Europe from residing the U.S. by imposing higher duties and literacy tests. His histories of the United States and political positions depended upon and promoted the belief that non-White races were inferior, and he relied on studies of cerebral folds, which he believed provided proof of evolution. For him battles across races that resulted in the domination of the white man were not acts of war, but rather, a necessary process in natural selection and the ridding of animalistic traits in man.

Although he seems to be a transient figure in librarianship, I find Fiske's story irresistible for the way that it opens space to inquire into larger questions about the legacy of racism in libraries. His death coincided with the 1901 American Library Association conference, and on the occasion Dr. James K. Hosmer delivered a eulogy, stating that, although Fiske had not been a member of the ALA nor a practicing librarian for some time, "It is perhaps quite right to say that no author at the present time is so frequently in the mouths and in the hands of the librarians...Everyone here has had opportunity, abundant opportunity, to know the greatness of John Fiske's mind."<sup>28</sup> When drawn into the fabric of late 19<sup>th</sup> century librarianship, we find that he is in direct dialogue and philosophically aligned with some of the more prominent librarians of the time. Indeed, there are clues that suggest reverence toward Fiske throughout library literature of the period—even in the instructions for applying the Library of Congress classification. For example, the 1902 *Order and Arrangement of the Books in the Stacks* uses the example of the classification of Fiske's *American History* to instruct librarians and users in the use and application of the new classification system (See Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Instructions for using Library of Congress Classification, with Fiske's work as example

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>27</sup> John Fiske, "Manifest Destiny," *Harper's Monthly*, 70 (1885): 583.

<sup>28</sup> J. K. Hosmer, "Memorial to John Fiske," *Library Journal* 26 (1901): 118.

*Source:* Library of Congress, *Order and Arrangement of the Books in the Stacks*, 1902. It seems that, although Fiske left the profession, the librarians continued to hold him in high esteem, and it is likely his theories influenced cataloging practice.

## MELVIL DEWEY, DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION

Much has been said about Dewey and his system with regard to its ontological and epistemological grounding and the marginalization of subjects.<sup>29</sup> Wayne Wiegand has written about Dewey's anti-Semitism, including the loss of his reputation and resignation of his position as State Librarian of New York upon protests regarding his exclusion of Jews and other ethnic and religious groups from membership in his elite Lake Placid Club. The classification provides some clues about Dewey's attitude regarding African Americans.

### Anthropology

The early editions of the Decimal Classification are strikingly similar to the Cutter system with regard to race, anthropology, and slavery. The first printed version, issued in 1876, is not highly subdivided, but we do see indications of evolutionary theory applied to the creation of racialized subjects. According to the subject index, works on "Negroes" are to be classed in two places: 573, designated for "Natural History of Man" within Biology, or in 326, reserved for "Slavery" within the political science section.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996); also see Hope A. Olson, "The Ubiquitous Hierarchy: An Army to Overcome the Threat of a Mob," *Library Trends* 52, no.3 (2004): 604-616; Hope A. Olson, "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs," *Signs* 26, no. 3 (2001): 639-668; Joseph T. Tennis, "The Strange Case of Eugenics: A Subject's Ontogeny in a Long-lived Classification Scheme and the Question of Collocative Integrity" *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 63, no. 7 (2012): 1350-1359; Bernd Frohmann, "Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in Library and Information Science," *Library & Information Science Research* 16, no. 2 (1994): 119-138; Jens-Erik Mai, "Classification in a Social World: Bias and Trust," *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 5 (2010): 627-642; Melodie J. Fox, "Gender as an 'Interplay of Rules': Detecting Epistemic Interplay of Medical and Legal Discourse with Sex and Gender Classification in Four Editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Melvil Dewey, *A Classification and Subject Index, for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library* (Amherst, MA, 1876). available in full text via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/stream/classificationan00dewerich#page/n7/mode/2up>

Jumping forward a bit to the 1919 edition, we find more clues to Dewey's logic.<sup>31</sup> There we observe that the 573 section is divided into categories such as "Color in man," which is followed by "Anthropometry," "Craniology," "Dwarfs and giants," and "Monstrosities." In 572 we see similar associations, as they relate to anthropological/ethnological understandings of race (See Figure 5).

- 572 Ethnology Anthropology**  
See also 136.4 Mental race characteristics
- .1 Unity of the human race**
  - .2 Diversity of races**
  - .3 Migrations of men**
  - .4 Original home of man: Eden, Atlantis, etc.**
  - .5**
  - .6**
  - .7 Savages: races divided by practises**  
Class description of savages of special country in 914-919; e. g. Australian bushmen 919.4
  - .8 Races divided by language like 400**
  - .9 Races divided by countries like 930-999**  
Divide by countries where possible. Use language divisions for groups like Semitic, Aryan, Teutonic, English, etc.
- 573 Natural history of man Somatology**
- .1 Man's place in nature**
  - .2 Origin of man**
  - .3 Antiquity of man**
  - .4 Influence of climate and surroundings**
  - .5 Color in man**
  - .6 Anthropometry**
  - .7 Craniology**
  - .8 Dwarfs and giants**
  - .9 Monstrosities**  
See also 611.012 Teratology; 613.01 Congenital defects; 617.3 Deformities

**Figure 5.** Dewey, 572-573, 1919 edition

The good news about Dewey is that his classification has been revised significantly. In 1989 Anthropology was moved out of Biology and into the Social Sciences. Some of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Melvil Dewey, *Decimal Classification and Relativ Index for Libraries, Clippings, notes, etc.*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lake Placid Club, NY: Forest Press, 1919), available in full text via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/deweydecimal10dewe>

572 and 573 sections were shifted to the 599 section, however. “Human ethnic groups” are still organized within the broader category of “Homo sapiens (Humans)” in zoology, carrying the implication that there is a biological basis for ethnicity (See Figure 6).

592-599	Specific taxonomic groups of animals
599	*Mammalia (Mammals)
599.3-599.9	Eutheria (Placental mammals)
599.9	Homo sapiens (Humans)
599.9092	Physical anthropologists
599.93	Genetics, sex and age characteristics, evolution
599.9/4	Anthropometry
599.9/5	Environmental effects on physique
599.97	Human ethnic groups
599.9709	Human races—history
599.97/2	Origins and causes of physical differences among ethnic groups

**Figure 6.** Dewey Decimal Classification at 599, 2015 edition

*Source:* WebDewey, accessed December 4, 2015

## Social Science and Education

Like Cutter, Dewey brought education together with the social sciences. The 326 section on Slavery is divided into nine classes in the 1919 version, including “Slave trade,” “Coolies and contract slaves,” “Serfs and serfdom,” “Antislavery,” “Proslavery,” “Emancipation and freedom,” and “History of slavery.” Additionally, some classes included “Negroes” as a subtopic. For example, 267.365 was defined with this hierarchy: “Religious societies for men” – “Work among special classes” – “Negroes.” It seems that this class was intended to house works about charity work done by religious organizations for “Negroes.” Similarly, 371.9 included books on “Education of special classes,” and was subdivided into “Physically defective,” “Mentally defective,” and “Morally defective,” as well “Special types,” which was further divided into “Freedmen Negroes,” “Indians,” and “Orientals” (See Figure 7). In 2015, 371.9 is defined as “Special education” and includes subdivisions for “Students with physical disabilities” and “Students with mental disabilities.” Now “African Americans,” “Hispanic Americans” and “Asian Americans” are arranged by the standard subdivisions explained below. They are added to 371.82, defined as “Ethnic groups – Education.” These are the resulting classifications:

- Hispanic Americans: 371.829**68073** (68 indicates Spanish Americans)
- Asian Americans: 371.829**95073** (95 indicates East and southeast Asian peoples)



- African Americans: 371.82996073 (96 indicates Africans and people of African descent)
- In each of these the 073 indicates American.

	On special institution, with institution
<b>.9</b>	<b>Education of special classes</b> General questions; kind and methods of education for these classes For institutions see 362, 364. For study of abnormal children see 136.76
<b>.91</b>	<b>Physically defectiv</b> See also 362.4 Asylums for blind and def
<b>.911</b>	<b>Blind</b> See also 655.38 Printing for the blind
<b>.912</b>	<b>Def</b> Finger alphabet See also 378 for degreeconferring colleges
<b>.913</b>	<b>Blind-def</b>
<b>.916</b>	<b>Crippled</b>
<b>.92</b>	<b>Mentally defectiv</b> Divided like 132. See also 362.3 Idiot asylums, 920.8 Lives of idiots, cranks, etc.
<b>.93</b>	<b>Morally defectiv Delinquents</b> See also 364 Reformatories. Criminal classes
<b>.94</b>	<b>Other abnormal classes</b> See also 136.764-9 in Childstudy
<b>.945</b>	<b>Exceptionals Precocity</b>
<b>.947</b>	<b>Dependents</b> See also 362 Hospitals, asylums and allied societies
<b>.95</b>	
<b>.96</b>	<b>Special ranks</b> See also 375.002 Courses for different social classes
<b>.961</b>	<b>Princes</b>
<b>.962</b>	<b>Nobles</b>
<b>.97</b>	<b>Special types</b> See also 136.77 Boys, the 'gang'
<b>.974</b>	<b>Freedmen Negroes</b> See also 378.75-.76 for degreeconferring colleges
<b>.975</b>	<b>Indians</b>
<b>.976</b>	<b>Oriental</b>

**Figure 7.** Dewey Decimal Classification at 371.9, 1919 edition

Finally, the remaining Social Science class into which “Negroes” were classed was within the topic of “Domestic economy” in the 600s. There we find at 647, “Household organization and administration,” a section for “Personnel,” subdivided into “Foren,” and the scope note indicates that this includes “Races and nationalities: orientals,

negroes, etc.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, “negroes” were read as foreign domestic servants. There are no visible traces of this arrangement today.

### Special Topics and Subdivisions

The pattern of establishing “Blacks,” “Negroes,” and “African Americans” as special classes has spread across the classification. One of the primary ways in which this is done is through the standard subdivisions that can be applied across the main classes as prescribed by a set of tables. To discern the present organization of race and ethnicity, I looked to WebDewey, another online professional tool. The subdivisions for race and ethnicity are set by Table 5. Again, we find the primacy of European races are sustained in the organization of “Specific ethnic and national groups.” Listed first among these groups is “North Americans,” which is subdivided into “Canadians” and “People of the United States (‘Americans’).”

#### DDC Table 5: Specific ethnic and national groups

- T5—1 North Americans
- T5—2 British, English, Anglo-Saxons
- T5—3 Germanic peoples
- T5—4 Modern Latin peoples
- T5—5 Italians, Romanians, related groups
- T5—6 Peoples who speak, or whose ancestors spoke, Spanish, Portuguese, Galician
- T5—7 Other Italic peoples
- T5—8 Greeks and related groups
- T5—9 Other ethnic and national groups

“Africans and people of African descent” appear in “Other ethnic and national groups.” This is where we find the subdivision “African Americans (United States Blacks),” a division that is particularly alarming given the distancing from the category “People of the United States.” There is so much to be troubled by here, beginning with the bizarre implication that people of the United States are ethnically or nationally American, as long as they are of European descent. It should be noted that “North American native people” are classed immediately after “Africans” in the “Other” category, so they are not considered ethnically or nationally American, either. These lines not only divide across race and nation, but they also indicate assumptions about citizenship and political status.

---

<sup>32</sup> Note that some of the categories are written in Dewey’s simplified spelling. See Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer*.

## LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Each of the knowledge organization systems described above influenced the organization of the Library of Congress Classification. Cutter proved to be the most applicable model for a large research collection, and the higher-level classes of the Library of Congress Classification mirror the Cutter system in many areas. As in Cutter's scheme, the H section is reserved for Social Science, and the E and F sections are for History.<sup>33</sup>

### Anthropology

Areas of the Library of Congress (LC) structure also bear a striking resemblance to Cutter's evolutionary framework. In the LC system, Anthropology is in GN, as part of the section on "Geography, Anthropology, Sports, and Games." This placement differs from both the Dewey and the Cutter system, as Anthropology is not in the Social or the Biological Sciences, but rather, it is associated with geography and particular customs. Similarities are found in the arrangement of classes within the discipline, however. For example, the 1910 version gives primacy to certain races at GN537-548, with ethnographic divisions of "Caucasic," "Aryan. Indo European," "Mediterranean," "Hamitic," "Semitic. Jewish," and "Mongolians."<sup>34</sup> These are followed by a list of "Special races," divided by place, including Africa, which is divided by region, type, and another level of "Special" (See Figure 8). Today, the arrangement is almost identical, although some (but not all) of the offending terms have been updated.

---

<sup>33</sup> Editions for the different disciplines were published at different times, so dates of publication of sections vary.

<sup>34</sup> *Library of Congress, Classification: Class G, Geography, Anthropology, Sports and Games* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), available via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001163420>

	<b>Africa.</b>
645	General (Negroes, Ethiopians, etc.).
646	North Africa.
648	Egypt.
649	Barbary States (Berbers, etc.).
650	Northeast Africa. Somaliland. Abyssinia.
651	Central and Equatorial Africa. Sahara and Sudan.
652	Special, A-Z.
	e. g. .B3, Batta tribe.
	.F9, Fulahs.
	.S4, Senegambia.
	West Africa.

**Figure 8.** Library of Congress Classification at GN645-652, 1910

## Social Science

J. C. M. Hanson, who oversaw the entire project of classifying the Library of Congress as the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, appointed subject specialists to create discipline-specific systems. Hanson selected Roland P. Falkner, a statistician, to devise an early version of the H Classification for the Social Sciences.<sup>35</sup> Prior to and after his appointment at the Library of Congress as director of the Division of Documents (1900 to 1904), Falkner was a professor of statistics, diplomat, and census taker. While professor at the University of Pennsylvania he contributed to U.S. Census sections on criminals and prisoners and compiled an 1890 *Statistics of Prisoners*. He also held the titles Commissioner of Education in Porto [sic] Rico (1904-1907), Chairman of the Commission of the United States to Liberia (1909), and member of the Joint Land Commission of the United States and Panama (1913). In 1911 and 1912 he was Assistant Director of the U.S. Census.<sup>36</sup>

Falkner cited the Dewey, Cutter, Harvard systems as models for LC's H section. Of these, he found Cutter to be the most satisfactory, but with some problems regarding specifics of the Library of Congress's collection. Unlike the Dewey and Cutter systems, LC's Social Science section did not include education. However, Falkner closely

<sup>35</sup> See Roland Falkner, *Statistics of Prisoners, 1890* (Chicago, IL: Wardens Association of the United States and Canada, 1892).

<sup>36</sup> F. Leslie Hayford, "Roland Post Falkner, 1866-1940," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 36, no. 216 (1941): 543-545.

adhered to Cutter's H and I sections in his 1901 draft, and in fact, used the following breakdown for "Classes of person" in Sociology:

iIZA	Blind and Deaf and Dumb.
IZB	Blind.
IZC	Deaf and Dumb.
IZE	Feeble-minded.
IZI	Indians.
IZK	Criminals.
IZN	Negroes, Freedmen.
IZP	Poor, The

This grouping very closely resembles Cutter's categories for special classes in education.<sup>37</sup> The first printed version H section (1910) was compiled by a number of LC catalog staff members who built upon and revised Falkner's original scheme. That edition appears to combine Cutter's H and I sections. It includes economics and political economy, as well as sociology.

LC's treatment of African Americans mirrors Cutter's system in its focus on African Americans in labor and as a special class.<sup>38</sup> In the LC scheme, African Americans were referred to as "Freedmen" and/or "Negroes," and there were three locations in the Social Sciences in which they were classed:<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Roland P. Falkner to Herbert Putnam, "Memorandum, Referring to Classification, Economics, etc.," July 17, 1901, Subject Cataloging Division, S190301971, Subseries 1, Box 14, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Washington, D.C.

<sup>38</sup> Library of Congress, *Classification: Class H, Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), available via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001163424>

<sup>39</sup> It appears that the 1910 edition of the H Classification was unfinished at the time of printing, as HT appears in brackets and seems to serve as little more than a place-holder. By 1920 the HT section, broadly defined as "Other Social Groups: Communities, Classes, Races," included large ranges for slavery and race. Works on slavery in the U.S., however, were to be shelved in the E section on American history. And "Races" was defined as "The race as a social group; race conflicts; the protection and development of lower races. Prefer GN (Ethnology), D-F (History). Indeed, many of the categories within this range provide references to preferred locations in those other disciplines. *Library of Congress, Classification, Class H: Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1920), 425-437.

HS875-891— Secret Societies—Freemasonry among Negroes  
HS2251-2265— Race societies—Negro  
HV3181-3185— Social pathology. Social and public welfare. Criminology.—  
Protection, assistance, and relief—Special classes. By race—Negroes

In 2015, according to Classification Web, HS875-891 is defined as “Freemasonry among blacks”; HS2226-2230 (moved slightly from the HS2251-2265 location) is “Blacks” in “Race societies”; and HV3181-3185 is “African Americans” as a “Special race or ethnic group” in “Protection, assistance, and relief.” Not much has changed.

### Special Topics and Subdivisions

One thing that has dramatically changed since 1910 is the addition of special topics or special groups across the classification. There are now hundreds of classes subdivided into special topics and classes of “African American,” “Black(s),” or “Negroes. These are not standard subdivisions, as with Dewey, but they do follow a formula. They are defined after the main class, and the differences between A34/A35 and N5 result from the fact that A34/35 were defined when “African Americans” was the preferred term, whereas N5 stands for “Negroes.”

Here are a few examples from different disciplines in 2016:

**HE6183.A35**—Transportation and Communication—Postage stamps. Postmarks—By topic—African Americans.

**JK723.A34**—Political institutions and public administration (United States)—Executive branch—Civil service—Special classes of employees—Other special, A-Z—African Americans. Blacks..

**PS153.N5**—American literature—History of American literature—Special classes of authors—Other classes of authors, A-Z—Negroes. African Americans. Blacks.

Perhaps the most obvious example of marking occurs in the American History section. The early 1901 draft of the History section of the Library of Congress Classification included one class at E441 for “Slavery controversy,” using precisely the same terminology found in the Cutter system. In the 1913 version the E441 section had greatly expanded to cover E441-453, with many subtopics. Most significantly, though, was the addition of E185 for works on Negroes within the category “Elements in the population.” Today that location, now defined as “African Americans” within “Elements in the population,” houses over 10,000 books at the Library of Congress.

The repeated marking of African Americans as “other” in opposition to an assumed, universalized whiteness also carries material effects on the shelves, as books in these classes will be physically segregated from the “general” topics.

## TAXONOMIC REPARATIONS

Derrida suggested that “a science of the archive” must include a theory of institutionalization that accounts for the ways in which authority is produced, and how it inscribes and reiterates itself.<sup>40</sup> I have tried to demonstrate here the ways in which library classificationists have produced their own authority as they produced subjects, and how an excavation of the traces that have been covered by time and convention can unearth the processes by which racialized formations become naturalized. Although one may be inclined to suggest that many of these librarians were simply a product of their time, there were men among them who were directly involved in state projects in expansion, education, and regulation of the U.S. citizenry. These men influenced and cited one another and established the authoritative practices and structures by which knowledge is organized today. Jonathan Furner has noted that, “it is important to recognize that, in its fixity, every classification scheme is an objective representation of a subjective point of view – that of its human constructors, who share the perspectives and ideologies of those populations with which they identify.”<sup>41</sup> My findings take Furner’s observations a critical step farther, as they show that these crafters are invested, in various and particular ways, in the project of nation-building and serve an imagined reading public.

Classifications are never built in isolation. They are informed by social processes and are in dialogue with one another. And the knowledge organization systems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – Google, Wikipedia, the Internet, etc. – are similarly influenced by and build upon these and other systems. With regard to race, these systems sustain and complement one another’s conceptualizations, as well as dominant, normative discourses. But their invisibility and ubiquity means that the systems and hierarchies are deeply embedded in our information retrieval systems, on the shelves, and across discourse communities. As Bowker and Star have argued, the hiddenness and naturalization of classificatory infrastructures heightens their potency and secures their ground.<sup>42</sup> As they become entrenched in information infrastructures, it becomes more difficult to resist or change them. Perhaps more importantly, catalogers reiterate and reinforce the authorized classifications each time they apply them to a bibliographic text.

Ronald E. Day has demonstrated that Althusser’s notion of interpellation is central to understanding subjectivity in documentary processes. Interpellation is, in

---

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Furner, “Dewey Deracialized: A Critical Race-theoretic Perspective” *Knowledge Organization* 34, no. 3 (2007): 144-168.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 33-39.

short, the process by which a subject's identity is constituted in response to being hailed or called within a given social order. Althusser uses the example of a police officer hailing a suspect to demonstrate the dialectical processes between the law and a respondent. In the context of information, Day says that "one must be prefigured to receive the hail of the order as a subject in a documentary way."<sup>43</sup> This happens by way of index terms and structures that carry ideological weight while facilitating access to information. One's own identity is directly tied to documents, and, in fact, Day argues that, "an identity as an identifiable *something* in modernity often appears through a documentary process."<sup>44</sup> This intermingling of identities and documents and indexical markers shape the way we search for information and how we identify ourselves and others within the documentary field.

When people seek information about human expression, subjectivity, and experience, the indexes and associations call forth certain identities and responses. This is an important point, especially when we take into account the findings of this study – one concludes that the segregationist, disenfranchising, racist conventions in library classifications have hailed readers of color in damaging ways. It follows, then, that further studies should ask whether these systems have barred readers from accessing information related to identity formation and history, or affected reception or circulation of available information.<sup>45</sup> We should bear in mind that the power to establish what qualifies as 'being' works or what counts as knowledge operates through reiteration and citation, but also through exclusion.<sup>46</sup> In fact, power relies on the things it excludes, producing absences and silences through acts of refusal, concealment, exclusion, or restriction. It is frightening to realize that our classifications really were not meant to call out to people who were not white. As Hope Olson has pointed out, Cutter's notion of "the class of people who use the library" suggests a "community of users with a unified perspective and a single way of seeking information."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the class of library users was not imagined to include African Americans, and each of the library classifications explored here reflects this. We might go so far as to consider the ways in which the marking, exclusion, and objectification of African Americans in the classifications have functioned as instruments of control and disenfranchisement. If it is by way of names and disciplinary norms that we arrive at knowledge in the library, and via markers that draw dividing lines, often in cruel and punishing ways, that we learn

---

<sup>43</sup> Ronald E. Day, *Indexing It All: The Subject in the Age of Documentation, Information, and Data* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 80.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Hope Olson begins to ask some of these questions across her work. See *Power to Name*.

<sup>46</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 188.

<sup>47</sup> Olson, "Power to Name," 642.



about ourselves in the world, then it is worth thinking about the ways subjects are constructed, who is excluded, and by what means people come to knowledge.

The legacy of disenfranchisement and segregation live on in the classifications, as does the evolutionary framework upon which some such practices were legitimized and based. Segregation and the denial of rights and opportunities for African Americans have relied on classification “along the color line,” to use W. E. B. Du Bois’s terms. Library classifications provide narratives of how librarians imagined African Americans to be of interest to an American reading public, but not of a reading public – as sources of labor, in slavery, for public morality, and so. We must ask whether and how these structures affect or prohibit the cultivation of the self for seekers of knowledge who have not been figured into the public addressed by the writers of the classifications.

We can look to history to consider ways to challenge and critique these systems, and perhaps to create reparative and more just taxonomies. Indeed, there is a rich history of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century African American librarianship, but it appears that people were interested in larger issues related to public service, collections, and training, and did not publicly interrogate the classifications.<sup>48</sup> I turn to W. E. B. Du Bois because he was an outspoken advocate for library services for African Americans in many parts of the U.S. For example, in 1902 he delivered the following demands to the Atlanta public library board:

Gentlemen, we are a committee come to ask that you do justice to the black people of Atlanta by giving them the same free library privileges that you propose giving the whites. Every argument which can be adduced to show the need of libraries for whites applies with redoubled force to the negroes.<sup>49</sup>

The committee’s demands were met with anger and refusal, and African Americans in Atlanta were denied access to the central library, and had to wait ten years for their own branch.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Reinette F. Jones, *Library Service to African Americans in Kentucky, from the Reconstruction Era to the 1960s*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001. The first documented project in subject access that I am aware of is a list of headings: Frances Lydia Yocom, *A List of Subject Headings for Books by and About the Negro*, New York, NY: H.W. Wilson, 1940. Available via Hathi Trust: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001163051/Home>

<sup>49</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Opening of the Library,” *The Independent*, 54 (April 1902): 809-810. For information on Du Bois’s advocacy work in New York, see Ethelene Whitmire, “Regina Andrews and the New York Public Library,” *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, 42, no. 4 (2007) 409-421.

<sup>50</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to Virginia Lacy, 19 December, 1950, in *Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois, Volume 3, Selections, 1944-1963*, edited by Herbert Aptheker, (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

Written around the same time as the library classifications described above, the collective work of Du Bois on access to education and rights serves as an important counternarrative. The classifications were constructed and revised at the same time that Du Bois wrote *Souls of Black Folk*, and at the same time that he was developing a new social scientific approach that examined the lived experiences of African Americans.<sup>51</sup> His “Strivings of the Negro People,” first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897 starts with the disquieting suggestion, “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question ... How does it feel to be a problem?”<sup>52</sup> and continues with evidence of the violence enacted upon Black bodies in America. He describes the problem of a “double-consciousness” that circumscribed African American life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereby a Black person could only view himself through the eyes of others, and how measuring the self according to a world that could only hold contempt and pity meant that he could not possess self-consciousness. This impossibility of self-consciousness derived in part from the various ways in which white Americans ordered the world’s races. He understood this all-too keenly: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world.”<sup>53</sup>

Du Bois gives us important knowledge about the experience of living with these categories – of being construed as exceptions to the norms, as a problem and inferior, and of striving for access to rights. Library classifications should be read as instrumental in the history of African American education and reading practices. Not only were libraries and schools segregated during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the classifications also structured a double consciousness segregating books by and about African Americans from books on the general population. We see how knowledge about, by, and for racialized subjects was organized from through a white lens, and begin to conceive of the ways in which this produces a double consciousness and limits one’s freedom to cultivate the self.

Many of Du Bois’s works are shelved in the E185 section of the Library of Congress, which houses over 10,000 works on African Americans as “Elements in the population.” The organization of works by and about African Americans in U.S. history and in other disciplines, almost always as a “special topic” or “special class,” shows that classification supports American racial ideology and notions of universality and citizenship, and how it produced this double consciousness—that one could not simply

---

<sup>51</sup> For accounts of the exclusion of Du Bois from the sociological canon see: Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015) and Reiland Rabaka, *Against Epistemic Apartheid: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington books, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” *Atlantic Monthly* no. 478 (August 1897): 194. A version of this piece was printed as the first chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

be American; one is a Negro or African American, removed from the “general” population and named within the set of “Elements in the population.”

Recent attempts to root systemic racism out of institutions have included calls to remove commemorative monuments and representations of slaveholders and white supremacists. The merits of and reasons for each of these removals vary and are entirely site-specific, but they all seem to be driven by a belief that we might find resolution through a disavowal and erasure of racist figures and symbols. In certain ways library classifications serve as monuments to the profession and its founders, but they are perhaps more (or at least differently) significant because of their hiddenness and their power with regard to access and ordering of knowledge. Indeed, they cannot easily be undone. Rather than removing, or even “fixing” them, I suggest that a number of other approaches might be taken.

I would like to propose the idea of creating local reparative taxonomies – and I use the term “taxonomy” somewhat openly, so that we imagine a variety of creative projects that speak against these racist (and homophobic and American-centric, etc.) systems. I am looking for more examples of already existing scenes in libraries and bookstores and everyday spaces where information is organized in ways that counter dominant narratives about race, and I’m thinking about ways we can raise consciousness in our libraries by using the library as a site of resistance and meaning-making. I am currently looking for formerly segregated libraries that still have catalog cards from the early twentieth century. My hope is that I can see how subjects were cataloged in African American libraries and whether there was a difference from white libraries. There is no best way to classify, but rather, there are multiple, local, community-based, and personal ways to organize knowledge and ideas. We might also use art and writing, as well as different kinds of ordering principles all together, to make more connections and facilitate encounters that are likely to be forestalled by the dividing lines in the library. On a practical level, libraries of all types and sizes should support and encourage metadata librarians and catalogers to augment the catalog with local data, create local and subject-specific classifications and subject access tools, encourage participatory and social cataloging, and invent alternative ways to map knowledge in the library.<sup>54</sup> A great example is the Notable Kentucky African Americans Database ( <http://nkaa.uky.edu> ) at the University of Kentucky, which brings thousands of stories of African Americans associated with Kentucky all together in one space. The librarians chose to create their own headings, derived from the source material, to provide accurate and precise subject access. When it comes to the shelf classifications, library workers should be encouraged to reclass and reorder the library space – perhaps just small sections, or only temporarily, or in a creative form like consciousness-raising signage – even if it takes a lot of time and effort.

---

<sup>54</sup> See Furner, “Dewey Deracialized” for more recommendations.

Coates points out that the idea of economic reparations for African Americans threatens something much deeper—America’s heritage, history, and standing in the world. This is a major reason why there is so much resistance to having serious conversations about possibilities for reparations and the legacy of long-standing, but often hidden, racist policies. Indeed, we might say the same about our library classifications. If we truly confront racism in the stacks, what do we unearth about our profession, and how do we go about making things better? I wonder how Du Bois would have organized knowledge differently if he had been writing library classifications in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. What would that classification look like today after more than a century of building upon that structure? What if a classification assumed something other than an unnamed whiteness as a universalized norm for its essential framework?

## REFERENCES

- Adler, Melissa. "The Case for Taxonomic Reparations," *Knowledge Organization*, 43, no. 8 (2016): 630-640.
- Berman, Sanford. *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1971.
- Bliss, Richard. "Report on Classification." *Library Journal*, 14, no. 1-2 (1889): 240-246.
- Bowker, Geoffrey and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2000.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York, NY: Routledge, 1993.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (June 2014), available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- Cutter, Charles A. "The New Catalogue of Harvard College Library." *The North American Review* 108, no. 222 (1869): 96-129
- . *C. A. Cutter's Expansive Classification* (1902), available in full text via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100184493>
- Day, Ronald E. *Indexing It All: The Subject in the Age of Documentation, Information, and Data*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Dewey, Melvil. *Decimal Classification and Relative Index for Libraries, Clippings, notes, etc.*, 10th ed. (Lake Placid Club, NY: Forest Press, 1919), available in full text via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/deweydecimal10dewe>.
- . *A Classification and Subject Index, for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library* (Amherst, MA, 1876). available in full text via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/stream/classificationan00dewerich#page/n7/mode/2up>
- Dousa, Thomas M. "Evolutionary Order in the Classification Theories of CA Cutter and EC Richardson: Its Nature and Limits." *North American Symposium on Knowledge Organization* 2, no. 1 (2011).
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "Strivings of the Negro people." *Atlantic Monthly* no. 478 (August 1897): 194-198.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Opening of the Library," *The Independent*, 54 (April 1902): 809-810.
- Falkner, Roland. *Statistics of Prisoners, 1890*. Chicago, IL: Wardens Association of the United States and Canada, 1892.
- Fiske, John. "A Librarian's Work," *The Atlantic Monthly* 38 (October 1876): 480-91.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Manifest Destiny." *Harper's Monthly* 70 (1885): 578-590.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The American Revolution*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1896.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A History of the United States: For Schools*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899.
- Foucault, Michel. "Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Paul Rabinow, ed. New York, NY: New Press, 1997.
- Fox, Melodie J. *Gender as an 'Interplay of Rules': Detecting Epistemic Interplay of Medical and Legal Discourse with Sex and Gender Classification in Four Editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification*. PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015.
- Frohmann, Bernd. "Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in Library and Information Science." *Library & Information Science Research* 16, no. 2 (1994): 119-138
- Furner, Jonathan. "Dewey Deracialized: A Critical Race-theoretic Perspective." *Knowledge Organization* 34, no. 3 (2007): 144-168.
- Guynn, Jessica. "Three Black Teenagers' Google Search Sparks Outrage," *USA Today* (10 June, 2016), accessed 12 June, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/06/09/google-image-search-three-black-teenagers-three-white-teenagers/85648838/>
- Hayford, F. Leslie. "Roland Post Falkner, 1866-1940," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 36, no. 216 (1941): 543-545.
- Holley, Edward G. *Raking the Historic Coals: The A.L.A. Scrapbook of 1876*. Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1967.
- Honma, Todd. "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2005).
- Hosmer, J. K. "Memorial to John Fiske." *Library Journal* 26 (1901): 117-118.
- Jones, Reinette F. *Library Service to African Americans in Kentucky, from the Reconstruction Era to the 1960s*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001.

- Lane, William Coolidge. *An Index Guide to the Classification of the Harvard College Library*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1905. Available at <https://archive.org/details/indexguidetoshel00harvrich>.
- Lears, Jackson. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009.
- Library of Congress. *Classification: Class G, Geography, Anthropology, Sports and Games*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910. Available via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001163420>.
- . *Classification: Class H, Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910. Available via Hathi Trust: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001163424>.
- Mai, Jens-Erik. "Classification in a social world: bias and trust." *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 5 (2010): 627-642.
- Miksa, Francis L. *Charles Ammi Cutter: Nineteenth-century Systematizer of Libraries*. PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1974.
- Morris, Aldon. *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015.
- Noble, Safiya U. "Google Search: Hyper-visibility as a Means of Rendering Black Women and Girls Invisible," *InVisible Culture* 19 (2013), <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/google-search-hyper-visibility-as-a-means-of-rendering-black-women-and-girls-invisible/>.
- Olson, Hope A. "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs," *Signs* 26, no. 3 (2001): 639-668.
- . "The Ubiquitous Hierarchy: An Army to Overcome the Threat of a Mob," *Library Trends* 52, no.3 (2004): 604-616.
- . "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries: Constructing Classificatory Space for Marginalized Knowledge Domains," *Library Trends*, 47, no. 2 (1998): 233-254.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).
- Powell, Lawrence Clark. "John Fiske—Bookman." *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 35, no. 4 (1941): 221-254.
- Rabaka, Reiland. *Against Epistemic Apartheid: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

- Roland P. Falkner to Herbert Putnam, "Memorandum, Referring to Classification, Economics, etc.," July 17, 1901, Subject Cataloging Division, S190301971, Subseries 1, Box 14, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Washington, D.C.
- Shapiro, Thomas M. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Tennis, Joseph T. "The Strange Case of Eugenics: A Subject's Ontogeny in a Long-lived Classification Scheme and the Question of Collocative Integrity" *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 63, no. 7 (2012): 1350-1359.
- Whitmire, Ethelene. "Regina Andrews and the New York Public Library," *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, 42, no. 4 (2007) 409-421.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1967).
- Wiegand, Wayne A. *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1996.
- . "Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us About the Present; Reflections on the Twentieth-century History of American Librarianship." *The Library Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (1999): 1-32.
- Williams, Mason B. "The Crumbling Monuments of the Age of Marble," *The Atlantic*, 5 December, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/warnings-from-the-age-of-marble/419004/>.