Proposed Change to the Display of the Subject Heading “Illegal Aliens”

Proposal

We, the undersigned, respectfully request that the USMAI Metadata Subgroup, and any other relevant bodies, take action to replace the display of the LC subject heading “Illegal aliens” in the shared USMAI catalog. We request that the word “alien” used in reference to people be replaced with “noncitizen” and the phrase “illegal alien” be replaced with “undocumented immigrant.”

This list of LCSH authorized headings containing the word “alien” or “aliens” which refer to people, rather than extraterrestrials, are a high priority for replacement, although the Subgroup may identify others:

Alien criminals
Alien detention centers
Aliens--Housing
Aliens--Medical care
Aliens--Medical examinations
Aliens--Mental health
Aliens--Political activity
Aliens--Suffrage
Aliens--Taxation
Aliens--United States
Children of illegal aliens
Church work with aliens
Illegal aliens
Illegal aliens in literature
Women illegal aliens

Rationale

The Library of Congress investigated and recommended this change in 2016 in response to feedback and petitions but was not able to implement the recommended changes, after the Legislative Branch Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee intervened, taking the unprecedented step of instructing the Library of Congress to retain the original heading in April 2016. The Library’s statement on the recommended changes noted that the term “Aliens” was both confusing and carried pejorative connotations.¹ Changing the displayed subject heading will demonstrate USMAI’s commitment to inclusion and respect for a vulnerable and often marginalized population.

¹ https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/illegal-aliens-decision.pdf
Required Resources

We acknowledge that this request will require the time and input of various stakeholders and decision makers within USMAI, and we entrust the Metadata Subgroup with determining the best procedural approach and workflow implementation.

Several libraries and library consortia have implemented a workaround, including Dartmouth College,\textsuperscript{2} \textit{iso-190051} the California State University Libraries,\textsuperscript{3} and Falvey Memorial Library at Villanova University.\textsuperscript{4} Those institutions have provided documentation that may help support the Metadata Subgroup in determining the necessary steps.

Sincerely,

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Rick Davis, Copyright & Scholarly Communications Librarian, Towson University
Elizabeth De Coster, Research & Instruction Librarian, Towson University
Julia Caffrey-Hill, Web Services Librarian, Towson University
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\textsuperscript{2} https://sites.dartmouth.edu/changethesubject/about/
\textsuperscript{3} https://libraries.calstate.edu/csulibraries-change-subject-heading-illegal-aliens/
\textsuperscript{4} https://blog.library.villanova.edu/2020/01/13/falvey-staff-members-work-together-to-change-the-subject-on-the-term-illegal-aliens/