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Totally Invisible: Asian American Representation in the Dewey Decimal Classification, 1876-1996

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Totally Invisible: Asian American Representation in the Dewey Decimal Classification, 1876-1996

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Keywords: Asian-American, Pacific Islander American, DDC, ethnic, race

1.0 Introduction

In 1968, the University of California, Berkeley was the site of the longest student strike in United States history. It was a time of civil unrest around the country as the civil rights movement gave way to black power, and protests against the Vietnam War gained traction. Students rose up to demand ethnic studies programs. One group of students banded together to join the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA). It was the first time the term “Asian American” had ever been used. It was a political term, chosen to gather students from different ethnic communities under one pan-ethnic banner. Students chose the name to replace the term “Oriental,” a label that had been thrust upon them. It caught fire, because Asian American communities felt empowered, standing together and naming themselves (Asian American Movement 1968, 2008).

This is the story that I heard as an Ethnic Studies major at Berkeley forty years later. In those forty years from 1968 to 2008, “Asian American” has come to encompass more communities and is often used synonymously with “Asian Pacific American,” or “Asian Pacific Islander American.” It has become a racial category on the United States Census, represented in the acronyms of countless community organizations, and is the term designating the month of May as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month. It has become a widely accepted yet sometimes problematic term.

The term “Asian American” is widely accepted in daily life, but what about in knowledge organization systems (KOSs)? One might assume the answer is yes, but “Asian American” is a complicated term. Further, bias in KOSs is well documented (Olson 2002). Taking the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) as an example of a well-established KOS and examining its portrayal of Asian American materials, this paper has three goals:

1. To relate existing literature on bias and knowledge organization to Asian American studies and critical race theories including the possessive investment in white-
3.1 Bias in knowledge organization systems

Bias is well documented in KOSs and not just in reference to race. Melanie Feinberg (2007) argues that all information systems, whether they focus on one domain or encompass multiple domains, are biased. She argues that since it is not possible to eliminate bias, the most responsible thing to do is to illuminate it. If system creators are clear about their choices, the user should be able to better understand and navigate the system. We aim to illuminate the biases of the DDC, helping to improve scholars’ understanding of the DDC and to hypothesize how to better represent Asian Americans in developing KOSs.

The structure of the DDC can be a source of bias. In The Power to Name (2002), Olson focuses her discussion of the DDC on the form of the KOS. Olson reads its structural divisions—forcing concepts into subdivisions of 10, relegate non-Anglo Saxon/Christian concepts to the “9” classes, creating false dualities, and perpetuating the oppression of hierarchies (which she links strongly to patriarchy)—as acts of violence. In her vocabulary, she identifies “the ghetto” and “the diaspora” as two equally unappealing results in the marginalization of underrepresented populations in library catalogues.

The semantics of systems are also bias incursion points. Keilty (2009) addresses word choice in classifying queer materials. “Quer,” like “Asian American,” is a constantly shifting, highly politicized category that has historically been treated badly in cataloguing. Keilty recognizes the powers of access and legitimacy that categories have but resists normalizing queerness according to systems rooted in “spectacle of discovering and ordering exotic plants and animals” (2009, 244) and colonialism.

3.2 Racial bias in DDC

Other authors, namely Furner and Beall, directly address race in the DDC, choosing to look at Table 5 in its contemporary form. Furner (2007) uses critical race theory as a lens to interpret the DDC’s decision to deemphasize race in Table 5. In the 22nd edition of the DDC, the editors renamed Table 5 “Ethnic and National Groups.” Since its emergence several decades prior, it had been called “Racial, Ethnic, and National Groups.” Along with the name change, the editors removed the “basic racial categories,” reasoning that the literature being written no longer required them and that sources referring to a specific race might now be classified under “ethnic group that most closely matches the concept of race described in the work” (Furner 2007, 156). Using critical race theory (CRT), Furner (2007, 164) shows that this decision to remove race from Table 5 “is perceived to have the effect merely of sustaining the hegemonic status quo in which discrimination and economic and social inequities in favor of whites are institutionally maintained.” This act ignores the racialized reality of United States’ power structures and takes away the power to self-identify. He also argues that we cannot work towards a more equitable library classification system without clearly defining what a just system might look like. He argues that CRT can help people envision that. This echoes Feinburg’s (2007) argument that bias should be illuminated, if not eliminated.
3.4 The perpetual foreigner

In writing about Asian Americans Lipsitz touches on the idea of the perpetual foreigner. This idea frames the sentiment that no matter how long Asian Americans as individuals or communities live in the United States, they are always viewed as foreigners, and therefore their loyalties to the United States are suspect. This was the basic reasoning behind the Japanese Internment during World War II. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans of all ages, citizen and noncitizen, were evacuated from the West Coast and sent to internment camps for the duration of World War II. Their Japanese heritage, not their actions or connection to Japan, made them potential enemies and spies of the United States in the eyes of the government (Takaki 1989, 392).

The treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II mirrors the treatment of Muslim and South Asians after September 11, 2001. This facile “if you look like the enemy, you must be the enemy” reasoning led to the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi. He was shot at his gas station by a self-proclaimed patriot and protector of the United States, because he was a brown man wearing a turban. Sodhi, a Sikh who had emigrated from India, was neither Muslim nor Arab (Potts 2001).

This stereotype continues to manifest in small daily encounters called microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007). There are countless stories of Asian Americans being told that they speak good English, or that they should go back to their country. Indeed, the experience is so common that Takaki begins his history of Asian Americans with his own stories of being cast as the perpetual foreigner, despite being American born. Given that DDC editors are influenced by their own cultural biases, this perception has impact on the use of the term “Asian American” in the DDC.

3.5 Racial formation

The last theory that we borrow from ethnic studies is Omi and Winant’s racial formation. Racial formation posits that conceptions of race have always been central to conceptions of American identity and power, even as the articulations of racial meaning have changed. Race cannot be simplified to class, nation, or ethnicity. Racism hinged on biological definitions of white supremacy through slavery, the post-Civil War period known as Reconstruction, and early Jim Crow, which enforced racial segregation through laws and extralegal racial violence. Then, with new immigration waves in the early twentieth century, the U.S. moved from a system of racial categorization to a paradigm of ethnic difference, where different ethnicities could be assimilated into the melting pot. The civil rights and black power movements shifted the conversation back to race, but did not quite usher in a new paradigm. In the 1980s, there was a push towards what has been termed color blindness, and racial language became coded in race neutral code words. Given this his-
Before the creation of the Asian American moniker, other pan-ethnic terms were applied to Asian American communities. These include “Oriental,” “yellow-races,” “Malays,” and “Mongols.” While all of these are now considered politically incorrect, if not outright offensive, they were commonly accepted terms in the past, so they are included in the data.

We track some terms, which are specific to Asian American, such as “cooie”; “alien owners” (in respect to land) because of the Alien Land Laws; “railroad employees” because of the many Chinese American railroad employees; “other” when used to reference all things non-Western; and “educational museums” because the scope note says to include international expositions (at the time, non-Western peoples, including people from the Philippines were imported as live displays for events such as world’s fairs).

References to Asian countries and areas, including South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific Islands are included, because the DDC, being American, is American-centric. It seems reasonable that an American editorial team would include Asian immigrants to America by their Asian identity rather than their American identity. If the situation were reversed, as in an Asian publication that describes emigrants to the United States, their American identity might be more relevant. Given that the DDC allows a great degree of faceting, Asian and American can represent two separate facets.

We track all of the Asian ethnicities included in the DDC in the full data set, but not all are included in the tables shown. Instead, the tables include an illustrative range of ethnicities, from those with large populations (e.g., Chinese), to ethnicities with small populations (e.g., the Gilbert Islands). Because the DDC classes are based on literary warrant, a range of communities is represented to represent a variety in the way Asian American is handled over time. In some cases, ethnic groups that are not directly analogous with nation states, including the Hmong, have been included, but subdivisions of nations, like Hong Kong, were not included even if they have distinct cultures.

The inclusion of a term in this paper does not assume that ethnicities should identify as Asian American. Neither does exclusion from this paper mean that those groups as less Asian American. We simply tried to represent a range of Asian American communities, and focus on pan-ethnic representation in the DDC. Similarly, it did not directly examine mixed race peoples, although as a mixed race person myself, I certainly believe that mixed-race individuals are full and equal members of the Asian American community. Neither do we track traditional Oriental terms that refer to the Middle East. Although the historical Middle East has a legitimate connection to modern Asian American identity, it is more related though Orientalism as a
theory than through modern notions of Asian American identity (Said 1979). We also take geography as a limiting factor. While Asian American may legitimately include transnational communities and individuals, as well as parts of the Americas outside of the United States, this study is limited to Asian Americans in the United States. Given that Asian Americans make up a diverse set of communities with multiple identities and interests, many categories that are not distinctly Asian American may have materials by Asian Americans or may have subjects to which Asian Americans are tangentially related. To include all of these categories (any part of class 920 “Biography” may have a book about or by an Asian American) does not contribute to this investigation of the racialization of DDC that we examine. According to this thinking, we do not include “American history” and “Literature” unless those categories explicitly referenced Asians or Americans. For example, in “Education,” from a relatively early year, the DDC includes “Orionals” as a special class [371.96 “Education. teachers, methods, and disciplines. Education of special classes. Orientals”]. The only known instance of the exact term “Asian Americans” is also in education [371.829 950 73, “Asian Americans, education”] in DDC 21 (1996), and the Table 5 reference that same year [950 73].

5.0 Findings

We split the DDC into two time groups. The first time period, 1876-1958, covers those editions that do not include Tables to synthesize numbers. This includes the 15th edition, published in 1951. The 15th edition reduced the size of the DDC roughly by half, accounting for the reduction in terms related to race and ethnicity as well. The second time period, 1969-1996, covers those editions that include Tables. The 1965 edition does not include Table 5, and may be considered a proto-table edition, but for the sake of presentation, we include it in the second time period. A third period, covering the two most modern editions of the DDC also exists, but because of the switch from the print editions to Dewey Online, it is not included in this project because the advent of the online search mechanism offers new search possibilities that significantly change the way that catalogers and users interact with the DDC.

Rather than incorporate these search mechanisms into our methodology, the most recent editions are areas for further study.

5.1 The appearance of terms in the indices

We split the tracked DDC terms into three categories:

1. Geo-political terms, which map to ethnic groups and national political boundaries. We recognize that many of these overlap, some of the terms refer to boundaries that no longer exist, and not all ethnicities exist within an autonomous nation state. Examples include Afghani-stan, China/Chinese, the Gilbert Islands, and Vietnam/Vietnamese;

2. Macro-regional terms, which map to general geographic areas that encompass more than one nation state. Some of these terms have racial meaning as well. We include them here if they can function as macro-regional terms as well as racialized terms. Examples include Asia/Asian, Austroasian/Austronesian, and Pacific Islands/Islander;

3. Racialized terms, which carry racial meanings but cannot be mapped to a political or geographic region. Terms are included if they cannot function as macro-regional terms, regardless of distant ties to geographies. Examples include alien, Asian American, coolie, and Mongol.

Terms in the indices are relatively stable and persist over time. Once they appear, they tend to remain in subsequent editions and once they are phased out they rarely reappear. In cases where one term is replaced by another term (Siem/Thailand, Formosa/Taiwan, Annam and Cochin China/Vietnam), both terms appear for several editions before the older term is completely phased out, if it is phased out at all. This does not comport with the changes observed by Tennis (2007) and might be considered in his taxonomy of changes. Annam and Cochin China/Vietnam are shown below in Table 1 as an example of a cluster of related terms. A letter “X,” shaded in grey, indicates that the term appears. A letter “N” indicates that it does not. Surprisingly, “Asian American” does not appear in the schedule or the index until DDC 21, in 1996, one hundred twenty years after the publication of the first edition. In the 21st edition, “Asian American” appears twice in the index—once in reference to Table 5 and once under the heading “Asian American, education” (371.829 950 73). This number does not appear in the schedule. The closest class is 371.82 (“Education. schools and their activities; special education. Students. Specific kinds of students; schools for specific kinds of students”), which includes a scope note that says (1996, ##):
or cultural practices, such as references to China porcelain that refer to objects rather than people, racial processes, or ethnic terms are combined. Additionally, we do not track terms that appear in every edition and have a set of unique terms associated with them (that is, these terms describe historical events or cultural practices that are specific to the geopolitical area, such as the Chinese Republic or Chinese communism). For our discussion, we use “China/Chinese” as an example.

The general expansion of the terms associated with “Asia/Asian” parallels that of the major geo-political terms, which we detail in our description of the “China/Chinese” below.

### 5.3 Major geo-political terms

There are two kinds of geo-political terms: major and minor geo-political terms. Major geo-political terms are terms that appear in every edition and have a set of unique terms associated with them (that is, these terms describe historical events or cultural practices that are specific to the geopolitical area, such as the Chinese Republic or Chinese communism). For our discussion, we use “China/Chinese” as an example.

The expansion of terms related to “China/Chinese” parallels the general expansion of the DDC. It starts with a small set of categories; it then continues to expand until the 14th edition in 1942. The number of terms shrinks in the 15th edition, matching the reduction of terms throughout the 15th edition; it then expands again. In 1963, area tables are introduced, followed by the full tables in 1971. The presence of the term “China/Chinese” is very consistent, but the classes within it are not. Chinese history, language, and literature appear in most, but not all, editions. Sometimes “Chinese history” is shortened to “China,” and then specified to be modern or ancient. Most of the terms are not specific to Asian America, and are most likely intended to describe Chinese in China.

The only terms that are explicitly Chinese American specific are “Chinese, discovery of America (1911-1943)” and “Chinese, exclusion act, U.S. history (1911-1942).” Strong arguments can be made for “Chinese immigration (1899-1932),” “Chinese servants, domestic economy (1911-1932),” and “Chinese, labor, political economy (1888-1932).” Anti-Chinese sentiment may account for

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**Table 1.** The appearance of selected geo-political terms in the Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vietnam/ Vietnamese</th>
<th>An(n)am/ An(n)amese</th>
<th>Cochín China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>1899</td>
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<td>1922</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>1942</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vietnam/ Vietnamese</th>
<th>An(n)am/ An(n)amese</th>
<th>Cochín China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2a. The appearance of “Asia/Asian” in the index, pre-tables era part 1, 1876-1922.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1876</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1888-1891</th>
<th>1894-1899</th>
<th>1911-1922</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000 General</td>
<td>100 Philosophy</td>
<td>200 Theology</td>
<td>300 Sociology</td>
<td>400 Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-1932</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>000 General</td>
<td>100 Philosophy</td>
<td>200 Theology</td>
<td>300 Sociology</td>
<td>400 Philology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2b. The appearance of “Asia/Asian” in the index, proto-tables and tables era part 2, 1965-1996.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000 General</td>
<td>100 Philosophy</td>
<td>200 Theology</td>
<td>300 Sociology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
immigration. Debates around Chinese immigrants stealing
American blue-collar jobs as well as the large numbers of
Chinese who ended up working as domestic servants or in
laundries may account for the other two.

Interestingly, the DDC does not include a reference to
“coolies” from “Chinese,” although “coolie” is a pejora-
tive term for immigrant laborers in the nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries. “Coolie” appears in the sched-
ule and index from 1885-1942. From 1927-1942, “coo-
lies, economics” and “Chinese, labor, political economy”
direct users to the same class, 331.6.

5.4 Minor geo-political terms

We classified “The Gilbert Islands/Gilbertese” as a minor
geo-political term, because none of the terms associated
with it are specific to the Gilbert Islands. From these
terms, a user can only assume that the Gilbert Islands are a
place, have a history, and people live there. From these
categories it is not clear whether there is even a language
unique to the Gilbert Islands (the Gilbert Islands won their
independence in 1979 and renamed the country Kiribati.
The official languages are Kiribati and English). This is a
direct contrast to “China/Chinese,” from which a user can
assume that a number of other subjects are associated with
the place. The Gilbert Islands are a very small example,
while China is a very big example. Most of the geopolitical
terms fall somewhere between the two.

5.5 Racial terms

Geo-political terms, as discussed above, are more specific
than the pan-ethnic term “Asian American.” This section
deals with conceptually broader terms, namely “ethnic”
and “race/racial.” The relationship between the two
terms is complicated.

Before the introduction of the Tables, “ethnic” rarely
appears in the index. Until 1927, it is only linked to relig-
ion. After the introduction of the Tables, however, the
number of classes “Ethnic” includes explodes in number.

In the 1996 edition, everything from cooking (641.592
“Ethnic cooking”), to government programs (353.533 9
“Ethnic groups, government programs”), to history
(940.403 “Ethnic groups, military troops, World War I”),
and psychology (155.82 “Ethnic groups, psychology”) can
be defined by ethnic groups. Table 3 below shows the
evolution of “ethnic” according to the frequency it ap-
ppeared in each edition.

In the pre-Tables era, “Race/racial” describes mainly
scientific and legal/political classes, even if those scientific
classes would be considered pseudoscholarly today. Scientific
classes include 136.4, “Race influence on mind;” 324.1,
“Race suffrage;” 572, “Races of man;” and 613.94, “Race
improvement, eugenics.” There is much more change and
expansion in classes linked to the term than there is in
“ethnic” during the same time period, and very little over-
lap in the classes they describe. The comparison is clearest
in the 1958 edition, shown in Table 4 below.

In the Tables era, the number of terms related to race and
ethnicity increases. As in the pre-Tables era, both have a
large proportion of classes in the 300s, some of which
overlap (both groups are associated with education, legal
status, and labor relations) and some of which are unique.
Between 1965 and 1986, “Race/racial” seems to fall out of
favor as a term. The 1965 edition has several “see” redirect-
s, sending users to “Ethnology,” “Civil rights,” and
“Ethnic groups.” “Ethnic” expands while “Race/racial”
contracts, but then in 1996, “Race/racial” expands signifi-
cantly.

6.0 Discussion

In his short story Yellow, Don Lee (2001) writes about the
ways that the ghosts of racism can control an individual’s
life as strongly as racism itself. Likewise, it is possible the
burdens of Dewey’s original biases will haunt us longer
than the biases themselves. Through these tables, we see
how knowledge builds like compound interest, constrained
as it is by its original structure. Dewey designed it to de-
scribe the world that he knew, America in the mid-
nineteenth century. The first edition relegates non-Anglo-
Saxon, non-Christian concepts to the edges of the classifi-
cation literally, labeling them “other” and putting them in
the 9s. Religion is an enduring example of this. In the
original DDC, Dewey reserved the first 8 classes for differ-
ent aspects of Christianity. 290 holds all non-Christian re-
ligions. And although much work has been done to expand
the range of the DDC and increase its sensitivity, much of
the original structure remains. No matter how far the DDC
expands, it is still operating within the constraints of its
form.

Naming normalizes, legitimizes, and reinforces ways of
thinking (Olson 2002). If the DDC continues to reflect the
worldview that it was built upon, then it can continue to
legitimate them in the present day. If the class “other reli-
gions” is seen as a marginalized social category (for exam-
ple, if one considers Judaism or Hinduism as a marginal-
ized community in history or the present), and one agrees
with Lipsitz that resources are used to maintain privilege,
then the DDC can be seen as a tool of knowledge, still re-
producing the narrative of possessive investment in white-
ness.

At the outset of this project, we set out to trace an in-
tellectual history of the DDC’s conception of Asian
American through the first 21 editions of the DDC. This
intellectual history proves difficult to illuminate for several
reasons, including the DDC’s lack of definitions and number building. Those two issues are discussed in greater detail below, as well as several of the observations we were able to make.

6.1 Definitions

The DDC is intended to be a classification system, not a detailed outline of knowledge (Eaton, in Miksa 1998). As a classification system, it includes scope notes for some terms but leaves most undefined. This lack of clarity may cause confusion for catalogers and users and forces us as researchers to make assumptions about terms’ definitions. These definitions may have seemed simple to a contemporary audience, but many definitions change with time or become obsolete. “Oriental,” for instance, has referred to areas from Palestine to Korea. The DDC editor may assume that catalogers know that Oriental churches refer to ancient Christian churches in Asia Minor, but what is to stop a cataloger from placing the Jews of Shanghai in the same class?

Variations of “Mongol” present a similar challenge. The DDC consistently classifies Asians and Indigenous peoples into one basic race, “Mongoloid.” In 1925 and 1932, “Mongolian” is related to “yellow races,” but then that reference disappears, and “Mongolian” seems to refer to the country of Mongolia. In the 1989 and 1996 edition, there is a difference between “Mongols” (942, presumably the country) and “Mongoloid race” (035, the basic race). The term “Mongolism” is also found in many editions to refer to forms of mental disability.

Even more problematic for this project is the lack of definition for racial, ethnic and national groups. In 1971, the DDC starts using the phrase “Racial, ethnic, and national groups” to denote a set of concepts. These are divided into three basic races, mixed races (made of permutations of known races), and specific groups (see Table 4).

Table 3. The table below shows the evolution of “ethnic” according to the frequency with which it appeared in each edition.

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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 Philosophy</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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Table 4. “Ethnic” and “race/racial” in the 1958 DDC indices.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>100 Philosophy</td>
<td>136.48 Ethnic psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 Theology</td>
<td>301.451 Ethnic sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 Sociology</td>
<td>216.83 Race Relations and Christian religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>400 Philology</td>
<td>312.9 Race: population statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 Natural Sciences</td>
<td>331.113 Race discrimination, employment practices, economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 Useful Arts</td>
<td>323.41 Race equality, political science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700 Fine Arts</td>
<td>324.1 Race, suffrage, qualifications, political science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 Literature</td>
<td>325.1 Race, immigration limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900 History</td>
<td>793.31 Ethnic dances, recreation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Race/Racial</th>
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<tr>
<td>100 Philosophy</td>
<td>136.45 Race, difference, psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 Theology</td>
<td>216.83 Race Relations and Christian religion</td>
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<td>800 Literature</td>
<td>793.31 Ethnic dances, recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900 History</td>
<td>613.94 Race improvement, eugenics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tations of the basic races), and many other categories that roughly correlate with the geographic subdivisions. This persists through several decades until the 22nd edition when the editorial board “deemphasized race” (##) in favor of the phrase “ethnic and national groups.”

The Tables comparing the use of the terms “race” and “ethnic” show that the concepts of race, ethnicity and nationality are related in the DDC. The choice to deracialize the DDC coincides with a more general movement toward colorblindness in the United States. According to Omi and Winant (1994), as well as Lipsitz (1998), colorblindness is a reaction to cultural-nationalist movements, an articulation of a post-racial society that positioned racial discrimination in the past. In reality, however, colorblindness delegitimates efforts to address racism, simultaneously perpetuating existing systems of inequality and making them harder to fix.

This confusion and lack of clarity is consistent with the shifting nature of what Omi and Winant call racial projects. Racial projects may not have racial formation as their goal, but they form, transform, destroy, and re-form racial meaning all the same. Racially implicit and explicit policies reinforce the racial politics of everyday life. They shape and are shaped by conceptions of race and the political demands that result from them. In this paper, we read the first twenty-one editions of the DDC as a racial project. Because racial projects shape and are shaped by conceptions of race at the same time, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to separate cause from effect.

6.2 The foreigner and the DDC

Asians appear most consistently in the tables in relation to history, literature and religion. These categories position the Asian as non-normative and foreign, often literally by using the term “other.” Asian Americans and Asians in America appear most consistently in the tables in relation to immigration, labor, and education. To find these classes in the index, a user may search by the terms “Asiatic,” “Chinese,” “foreign,” “ethnic,” or “race.” All of these indexes position Asian Americans as Asian, not Americans as those of British origin, people of the United States as a national group. Thus, the DDC defines normative Americans as those of British descent. Everyone else should be properly identified as ethnic groups living in America using their ethnic subdivision + 073 (meaning “in the United States”).

6.3 Number building

A prescribed solution for creating Asian American categories emerges with the advent of Standard Table 5 in 1969. This solution combines racial, ethnic, or national terms with location terms, giving us 089950073 as an add-on to most subjects (089 (“Racial, ethnic, and national groups”) + 950 (“Asians”) + 073 (“America”).

To equate Asians in America with Asian Americans is problematic. International students, tourists, or business people who spend several months per year in the U.S. might not want to be considered Asian American. Conversely, Asian Americans who have lived in the United States their entire lives, or for several generations, might not consider themselves Asian at all. Rather, they are Asian Americans living in the United States.

The ability to build numbers raises an interesting dilemma—the classes enumerated in the schedule are a small number of the possible classes listed in the index. The index, in turn is only a small portion of the numbers that might be constructed using the “divide like” mechanism or the standard tables. We define these possibilities into three separate categories—what is described, what is prescribed, and what is possible. What is described is the most explicit level of inclusion. These are instances found, verbatim, in the schedule or index. For Asian Americans, the only instance of described inclusion is 196, in the index, under Table 5 (950 073). What is prescribed refers to DDC supported options not enumerated in the schedule or index. According to the usage notes, again in the 1996 edition, the proper way to indicate Asian Americans would be to use Tables 1, 2, and 5. After any subject then, Asian American would be 089950073 (meaning “in the United States”).

today—decreasing the number of immigrants and refugees allowed into the United States in the name of national security; protecting American jobs from foreign competition; and the rights of immigrants to education, namely the DREAM Act (2009). This continued depiction of immigrants as inassimilable foreigners suggests that this racialization has more to do with public policy than racial characteristics, and that the DDC reflects this way of thinking.

The DDC defines Americans narrowly. In the 21st edition, the scope note for T5-13, “People of the United States (“Americans”),” reads “class here United States citizens of British origin, people of the United States as a national group.” Thus, the DDC defines normative Americans as those of British descent. Everyone else should be properly identified as ethnic groups living in America using their ethnic subdivision + 073 (meaning “in the United States”).
things that are possible to do but not supported by the DDC as such.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 The DDC as a racial project

Although the DDC does not explicate racial theories, it does situate race and ethnicity within a greater knowledge organization structure. This qualifies it as a racial project. A general progression of race and ethnicity as separate concepts in the early editions is discernable, leading to a closer conflation of the two terms with the advent of the Tables. With the advent of Tables, racial classes decline while ethnic classes expand, suggesting a preference for ethnic, rather than racial terms. The deracialization of the DDC can be understood as a late move towards colorblindness (Omi and Winant place the beginning of colorblind policies in the 1980s). Throughout all the editions, racial classes maintain a link to science that is not present in ethnic categories.

7.2 Semantic warrant as a codification mechanism for whiteness

Beghtol (1986) identifies four types of semantic warrant—literary, scientific/philosophical, educational, and cultural—as justifications used in the construction of KOSs. Literary warrant links KOS structure and subject inclusion to an existing body of literature. This idea of literary warrant would seem to absolve DDC of direct responsibility. According to literary warrant, the editors of the DDC expand and discontinue classes not according to their own desires but as knowledge production demands it.

Other types of semantic warrant, however, describe how structure and subject inclusion convey meaning and values. Cultural warrant, for example, acknowledges that KOSs reflect the cultural values of the society in which they were created. Beghtol (1986, 120) identifies what she calls “the American middle-class biases of the DDC.” Cultural warrant allows us to ask “Whose literature? Who ranks as important?” Non-Christian religions certainly existed in Dewey’s day and a large body of literature on them existed, but that did not stop him from relegating them to the very end of the class.

There is a story from the early days of Asian American Studies about an author named John Okada that can help to contextualize this position. He wrote about Japanese Americans and their experiences in the 1950s and 60s before most people thought Asian American literature even existed, much less considered it in any discussion of literary warrant. His first book, No-No Boy, tells the story of a young man who is sent to prison during World War II (the historical background involves a loyalty questionnaire distributed in internment camps). The book was published as a small run and gained very little notice. Okada was so discouraged that no one cared about his book or Asian American literature that his widow burned his second book. It was only after his death that a group of young Asian American writers rediscovered the book and reprinted it on their own. No-No Boy is now considered an Asian American classic, but that second book is lost (Inada 1981).

This story makes a point about literary warrant—more publications do not necessarily make a subject more important. To the contrary, emerging topics and unpopular subjects can be of incredible importance. The principle of least effort says that information seekers will “adopt a course of action that will expend the probable least average of their work” to satisfy their needs (Case 2005). In view of the possessive investment in whiteness, if information on Asian Americans is difficult to find in the DDC (as we show to be the case), it is likely that no one but the most motivated researchers are likely to find it, perpetuating its seeming unimportance.

The possessive investment in whiteness describes how investment in the status quo is an investment in a system that compounds privilege for white Americans, while compounding disadvantages for people of color. Literary warrant is an example of the possessive investment in whiteness, as it reinforces colonial terminology for Asian ethnicities. This outdated and inaccurate terminology delegitimates and obscures sources that deal with Asian American subjects, making them more difficult to study.

7.3 Self-identification and the DDC

The basic goal of the first edition of the DDC was to organize a universe of knowledge into arbitrary base 10 divisions, based on the world vision of the white, nineteenth century, American male. It assumes that subjects and people can be assigned a correct term and location. The subsequent editions struggled to expand the DDC to encompass expanding world views. “Asian American” and its sister/twin “Asian Pacific Islander American,” in contrast, were born out of political struggle, pan-ethnic identities to unite diverse communities that suffered similar racializations in the U.S. As an identity, it signifies personal choice and contextual flexibility. Because these terms are difficult to define, change over time, signify different things to different people and are not uniformly adopted within communities; they can be difficult to fit into the neat categories required by traditional KOSs.

A large part of the problem is that these categories were originally created without input from Asian or Asian American communities. And while this is understandable...
in the historical context of the creation of the DDC, we have shown how the structure of the DDC continued to perpetuate whiteness through the first twenty-one editions. Omi and Winant highlight the importance of community control for Asian Americans. Because historical Asian American communities (like Chinatowns and Manilatowns) are located on prime downtown real estate, they often have to fight off commercial obliteration (often cast as urban renewal and gentrification) and being overrun by tourists. Many Asian American communities build alternate institutions to deal with issues like equal housing and culturally appropriate education. Rather than fight for representation in the dominant Eurocentric cultural discourse, many Asian Americans seek to create alternate avenues where they can develop “genuine oppositional culture [that] could be distinguished from assimilationist practices” (Omi and Winant 1994, 105).

This is apparent in cultural production sites like The Center for Asian American Media 2016 and Angry Asian Man (Yu 2002), which seek to provide alternate avenues to Asian American representation. This suggests that accuracy and self-identification are more important than mainstream acceptance. It also suggests that if KOSs do not accurately portray Asian Americans, or are not useful to their needs, Asian Americans might build alternate systems.

Whether or not Asian American cultural production includes alternate KOSs, mainstream KOSs lose an important facet of American culture if they do not allow for the accurate representation of works about Asian America by Asian Americans. These difficulties are not unique to Asian Americans. Other communities have already begun theorizing and building alternate KOS systems that allow for more flexibility and self-identification. Keilty’s work shows the problems inherent in normalizing queer vocabulary (2009). Feinberg argues that the goal is to recognize and ameliorate bias, because it is impossible to purge it from systems (2007). In the last chapter of her book, Olson (2002) enthusiastically supports hyperlinking to improve the representation of underrepresented minorities in KOSs. Brian Deer, one of the first Indigenous librarians in Canada developed the Brian Deer classification scheme to describe and organize the Indigenous materials he was working with, outside of the Eurocentric systems like the Library of Congress Classification. Rather than attempt to encompass multiple Indigenous world views in one scheme, his system is context specific (Cherry and Mukunda 2015) that can be adapted for every new context it is applied to.

### 7.4 Considering modern KOSs

This project serves as an overview, a new way of approaching the DDC. The first twenty-one editions of the DDC are an incredibly large body of work. Closer readings should be done on the ontogeny of single ethnicities and the development of Table 5. Close comparisons should be done with these findings and other racial projects like the U.S. Census forms. Work should also be done comparing these findings to where Asian American literature is classed in libraries that use the DDC.

Examining the pre-digital DDC as a racial project paves the way to practical applications to ameliorate the effects of bias in KOSs, including more community control over structure and definitions. Within the digital world, free from the restraints of physical space and linear thinking, lie new possibilities for KOSs like hyperlinking, social tagging, and user-sourced knowledge. Technology, however, is always a tool and never a holy grail. Further research has the opportunity to engage with emerging technologies and ameliorate bias as systems develop, rather than try to adapt to ill-fitting legacy systems as is evidenced by the DDC’s historical attempts to accommodate Asian Americans.

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