

Date: April 14, 2023

From: Core Subject Analysis Committee (SAC)

To: Core Metadata and Collections Section Leadership Team

**RE: Letter from the World Jewish Congress about the classification of Holocaust denial literature dated February 28, 2023**

The Core Subject Analysis Committee thanks the World Jewish Congress for its recent letter raising concerns regarding the classification of Holocaust denial literature, both online in library catalogs and physically on library shelves. Given the rise of antisemitism both [nationally](#) and [worldwide](#), noted by the United Nations General Assembly in the passage of their [resolution](#) in January 2022 condemning Holocaust denial literature, the Committee recognizes the gravity and seriousness of the issue at hand.

The Committee has discussed various options for immediate actions local librarians could take in their library catalogs, using the resources libraries already have, to help clarify for patrons the difference between legitimate literature about the Holocaust and Holocaust denial literature. These possibilities include:

- Adding to bibliographic records for Holocaust denial literature in library catalogs the following subject and genre/form terms:
  - 655 #0 \$a Holocaust denial literature. [GENRE/FORM]
  - 655 #0 \$a Antisemitic literature. [GENRE/FORM]
  - 655 #7 \$a Anti-Semitic works. \$2 rbmscv [GENRE/FORM]
  - 650 #0 \$a Holocaust denial literature. [SUBJECT]<sup>1</sup>
  
- Removing from bibliographic records for Holocaust denial literature in library catalogs all other subjects pertaining otherwise to the Holocaust, and just leaving “650 #0 \$a Holocaust denial literature.” This would help reduce the chances of works of Holocaust denial being returned in library search results when patrons look for works about the Holocaust.
  
- Carefully applying the existing separate classification numbers for Holocaust denial literature (D804.35 in Library of Congress classification, and 940.531818 in Dewey Decimal classification) and critiques of Holocaust denial (D804.355 in Library of Congress classification). And evaluating books about the Holocaust that are already held in local collections (particularly pre-1990s materials) to make sure works are classified appropriately according to current standards, and to reclassify materials as needed.

These actions would help clarify and separate Holocaust denial literature from legitimate works about the Holocaust, at least in library catalogs. However, the Committee realizes that this does not rectify the issue of side-by-side placement on physical library shelves. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers for

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<sup>1</sup> The subject heading “Holocaust denial literature” is explicitly authorized to be used for actual works of Holocaust denial literature. So it can be used both as a subject heading and as a genre/form heading.

this issue. Nevertheless, the Committee has identified several avenues of exploration for future possible classification changes:

- Considering proposals for moving the classification for Holocaust denial literature to the end of the Holocaust’s classification number range, to separate denialism more distinctly from legitimate works about the Holocaust. In Library of Congress classification, this could be done just for Holocaust denial literature itself, leaving the critiques of denial literature next to other works of historiography; or both denial-related classification numbers could be moved in tandem.
- Considering the classification of denialist literature and controversial works holistically within the classification system:
  - This might involve moving all such works (including Holocaust denial, Holodomor denial, etc.) to a classification number for untrue “histories.” Scholars of denialist literature might find this useful, as they could then compare and contrast, and trace patterns across, denialist literatures.
    - This could be an existing classification number, such as AZ999: “History of scholarship and learning. The humanities--Popular errors and delusions” in Library of Congress classification. This classification is frequently associated with the subject heading “[Common fallacies](#),” the broader term for “[History \\$x Errors, inventions, etc.](#)” (which in turn is the broader term for “[Conspiracy theories](#)” and other headings for historical untruths)
    - Or a new classification number could be created, perhaps associated with the recently-created subject heading “[Misinformation](#),” and denialist works could be classified there.
  - Or, as in the previous suggestion regarding Holocaust denial classification specifically, classification for denialist and controversial works holistically could be moved to the end of their respective ranges. This would physically separate denialist works from legitimate history, for both Holocaust denial and Holodomor denial (the other denialist literature currently named in the Library of Congress Subject Headings, with a classification similarly mixed with legitimate historical topics), and potentially for other works of “controversial literature” that are in fact misinformation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The current classification approach to Holodomor denial is slightly different from that of Holocaust denial. The two classification numbers related to Holocaust denial (D804.35 and D804.355) are in the middle of the Holocaust sequence, immediately following D804.348 for historiography of the Holocaust. Although this is a logical placement thematically, it can make it difficult to distinguish works of Holocaust denial from legitimate histories of the Holocaust on the shelf if one doesn't know the gradations of the classification schedules by heart. There is no classification number for historiography of the Holodomor; and the classification number for Holodomor denial (DK508.8378.H65) is in a range of “Special topics” numbers at the end of the Holodomor sequence. Unfortunately, although this places works of Holodomor denial near the end of the sequence, they are still between classification numbers for legitimate works about the Holodomor (economic aspects and press coverage), thus still potentially hard for patrons to distinguish. Moving denialist and controversial works to the very end of their respective topical ranges holistically would eliminate the confusion caused by both of these approaches to denialist literature.

The Committee hopes that the near-term possibilities are helpful in combatting antisemitism and Holocaust denialism in library catalogs. We also hope that the longer-term suggestions result in useful conversations about the placement of denialist and controversial works writ large on library shelves, their effects on patrons, and how libraries can perhaps more constructively use library classification schemes to fight against misinformation.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, Core Subject Analysis Committee 2022-2023