

Book Reviews

Billey, A., Nelson, E., & Uhl, R. (Eds.). (2024). Inclusive cataloging: Histories, context, and reparative approaches. ALA Editions.

Inclusive Cataloging: Histories, Context, and Reparative Approaches reexamines cataloging, which has often been perceived as a technical and impersonal activity since the advent of Machine-Readable-Cataloging (MARC), as a practice rooted in social and historical contexts that reflects human thought and values. For this reviewer, who has ten years of experience as a school librarian in Japan and is currently enrolled in an ALA-accredited MLIS program in the United States, this book provides an opportunity to reconsider the significance of cataloging from a transnational perspective. While this reviewer previously understood "creative cataloging" in Japan as the inclusive and flexible application of existing classifications to meet student-centered needs, studying in the United States and engaging with this volume highlighted both the structural depth and social justice implications of such efforts.

The book comprises twenty-eight chapters, divided into two sections. The first section, "History and Theory," explores pioneering practices by BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and People of Color) librarians, accessibility, the relationship between language and power, gendered information, and the theoretical and historical foundations of inclusive cataloging. Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive discussion of the principles and societal significance of inclusive cataloging. The second section, "Case Studies", presents nineteen examples from public, academic, and research libraries, illustrating concrete applications such as revising Library of Congress

Subject Headings (LCSH) headings and other controlled vocabularies. By combining theoretical discussion with practical examples, the book allows readers to understand how inclusive cataloging is implemented in real-world contexts.

The urgency of vocabulary revision becomes particularly apparent when contrasted with this reviewer's experience in Japan. Because Japan has historically viewed itself as a homogeneous nation, differences in race or sexual orientation have rarely become central political issues. Consequently, specific terminology is seldom recognized as a site of rights claims that directly affect the dignity or even the survival of marginalized groups. Living as an outsider in the United States, this reviewer was able to confront the tangible implications of terms such as "illegal aliens" in LCSH and trace their transformation from discriminatory language to socially redefined headings. In this way, the practices described in the book emerge from contexts where language is intimately connected to social and political realities, offering profound insights into the power of cataloging to influence society.

The book also addresses structural challenges, noting that automation and established systems such as MARC can perpetuate historical biases. Because descriptive systems can never be entirely value- neutral, catalogers are called to act as agents actively responding to social injustice. In alignment with the American Library Association's (ALA) DEI policies (American Library Association [ALA], n.d.), the book acknowledges the practical disruptions and ongoing revisions inherent in updating vocabulary, yet it also clearly demonstrating the potential of inclusive cataloging to reshape society through language.

Ultimately, this volume is a highly insightful book that reveals social injustices embedded in American society through the lens of cataloging. For an international librarian, engaging in efforts to change social realities through bibliographic work offered a renewed understanding of the claim that libraries are not neutral. This book is recommended not only for those with an interest in cataloging but also for anyone committed to social justice, as it provides a clear account of how choices in vocabulary and classification constitute ethical engagement with society.

Reference

American Library Association. (n.d.). *Equity, diversity, and inclusion: Positioning ALA as a trusted, leading advocate for equitable access to library services for all*.

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity>

*Reviewed by Aya Nakata, Graduate Student,
Texas Woman's University.*

Aikin, J. (2025). *The Library of Congress: From Jefferson's Vision to the Digital Age*. Georgetown University Press.

The Library of Congress: From Jefferson's Vision to the Digital Age develops a narrative surrounding one of the largest and most influential cultural institutions in the field of Library Science. This 10-chapter volume documents the Library of Congress' (LC) humble beginnings as a resource for Congress during the establishment of Washington D.C. to its leading role in librarianship worldwide. In short, well-organized sections, this volume serves as the ultimate reference source for the history of the field of librarianship through an American political lens. Librarians from all disciplines can find the relevant history behind many of the decisions still shaping the field to this day.

Despite the original five-thousand-dollar appropriation to purchase books for Congress, overtime, the scope of Library's responsibilities grew (p. 3). In extending privileges to Supreme

Court justices (p. 10) and other members of the government, the LC's services took on a new role: supplying the nation with information. In his tenure as Librarian of Congress, Ainsworth Rand Spofford pushed for his vision of a "national library" (p. 43) to promote democracy and learning throughout the nation. In the following years, Spofford and the following Librarians of Congress worked to achieve just that. By instituting the Copyright Act as well as offering additional services, the LC stretched its constituency beyond Congress to the American public and the library community. Under the leadership of Herbert Putnam, the LC began selling catalog cards, acting as one of the first institutions to offer cataloging services to smaller libraries. Putnam pioneered the idea that the LC, and by extension all libraries, should be a "provider of services rather than merely a storehouse for books" (p. 69).

In providing the history of the Library of Congress, readers also experience the history of our nation through the lens of librarianship. In the early years, the collection was greatly affected by the burning of Washington D.C. during the War of 1812 (p. 13) and funding shortages in times of economic hardship. At many of the nation's most tragic and unstable moments, the LC provided information and research to help the nation. For instance, during World War I, military authorities often requested information on gases and explosives as part of their war efforts (p. 83). Even after the Kennedy assassination, Jackie Kennedy asked for information about Lincoln's funeral causing LC staff to work around the clock pouring through Lincoln's personal papers to answer her questions.

Not without its controversies, this history does not shy away from addressing the library's professional and academic issues over the years, many of which reflect the challenges librarians still face. Concerns about the controversial topics in library collections are , with the initial purchase of still a persistent issue, but during its acquisition, Jefferson's personal library was criticized by Federalists in their time as an "effort to bankrupt the Treasury, beggar the people, and disgrace the nation" because

Jefferson's collection promoted "atheism, immorality, [and] effete intellectualism". The controversial decision to honor the poetry of Ezra Pound with the Bollingen Prize in 1948 highlighted the issues of endorsement of materials by the library. Even the appointment of non-librarian Archibald MacLeish to the position of Librarian of Congress demonstrates the questioning of the library field itself. The book also confronts the Library's issues in its hiring diversity in the 1970s while highlighting the contributions of early staff members such as John Francis Nicholas Wilkinson, the first Black employee at the LC. (p. 170, p. 61). Beginning in 1857, Wilkinson worked his way to Assistant Librarian of the Law Library, opening doors for a more diverse staff including the hiring of the first female staff member, Bessie A. Dwyer in 1893 (p. 62).

In examining the evolving visions and goals of the LC, Aikin truly argues for the ongoing need for a diverse and comprehensive national information repository in order to serve our nation in a productive way. In an age of anti-intellectualism and library defunding, Aikin's work offers a retrospective on library history full of progress and development, often centered around individuals who work hard to make their voices heard, making it an inspiring read for librarians in various disciplines. This book is truly a love letter to the library, the people who have made our field what it is, and the progress we still have to make.

*Kathryn Milschewki, Graduate Student,
University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.*