

# Improving LCSH, One Subject at a Time

## Work of the African American Subject Funnel Project



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# Overview

- Challenges of LCSH
- Work of the African American Subject Funnel Project
- How to develop and submit a LCSH proposal
- What can you do?

# What's Wrong with LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings)?

- Centers whiteness
- Includes outdated terminology
- Omits concepts related to the African American experience

# Centering Whiteness

“Marked” vs. “unmarked” headings

- African American art museum curators / Art museum curators
- Asian American actors / Actors

People of color = “Minorities”

# Outdated Terminology

- “Illegal aliens” (instead of “Undocumented immigrants”)
- “Blacks” (instead of “Black people”)
- “Slaves” (instead of “Enslaved people”)

# Lacking Concepts Related to the Black Experience

- Great Migration
- Blackface
- Environmental racism
- Slave auctions
- Slave markets

# Other Challenges

- LCSH is an old vocabulary (dating back to 1898)
- LCSH is not designed to be updated frequently
  - E.g., over 100 headings containing “Blacks”
- Lack of transparency in the subject approval process
- The Library of Congress retains control over LCSH
- Few institutions and few catalogers involved in the proposal process

# SACO Funnels

- Established in 1995
- Groups of libraries or librarians who contribute to LCSH
- Efficient means of contributing for all levels of expertise
- Regionally based or subject-specific: [List of current funnels](#)



# African American Subject Funnel Project

- Established in 2000
- Focus on the African American experience
- 20-30 members from public and academic libraries
- Various levels of expertise
- Built funnel-specific documentation

# New Headings by the African American Funnel

## 2019-2020

- Blackface
- Digital blackface
- Yellowface
- Jewface
- Redface
- Brownface
- Black wall streets
- Afrofuturist fiction
- Sundown towns
- Ax Handle Saturday, Jacksonville, Fla., 1960

## 2021

- Night riders
- Night riding
- Racism against Blacks
- Environmental racism
- Slave auctions
- Slave marriage
- Slave markets
- Great Migration, ca. 1914-ca. 1970

# Developing Subject Proposals

1. Establish literary warrant
2. Determine if the term fits LCSH standards
3. Find reference sources which demonstrate usage
4. If needed, write a scope note with a neutral tone

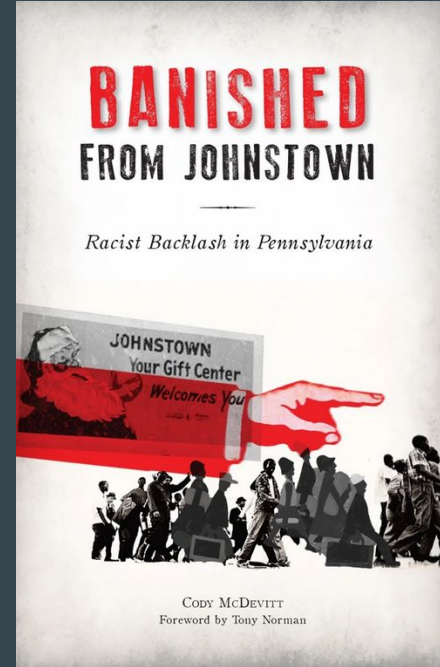
# 1. Establish Literary Warrant

- A “literary” object must warrant or need this term for its description
- Ask yourself: Can I accurately describe this resource using existing LCSH terms?

# 1. Establish Literary Warrant, continued

Back cover begins:

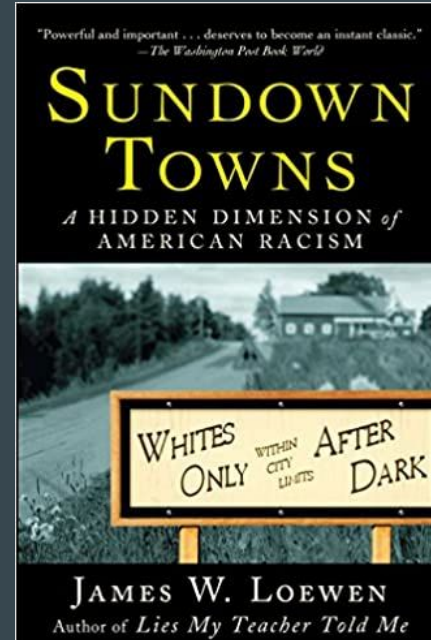
"In 1923, in response to the fatal shooting of four policemen, the mayor of Johnstown [Cambria County, Pa.] ordered every African American and Mexican immigrant who had lived in the city for less than seven years to leave."



[Banished from Johnstown by Cody McDevitt \(2020\)](#)

# 1. Establish Literary Warrant, continued

- African Americans--Segregation.
- Cities and towns--United States.
- Suburbs--United States.
- City and town life--United States.
- Suburban life--United States.
- Discrimination in housing--United States.
- Racism--United States.
- United States--History, Local.
- United States--Race relations.



[Sundown Towns by James W. Loewen \(2005\)](#)

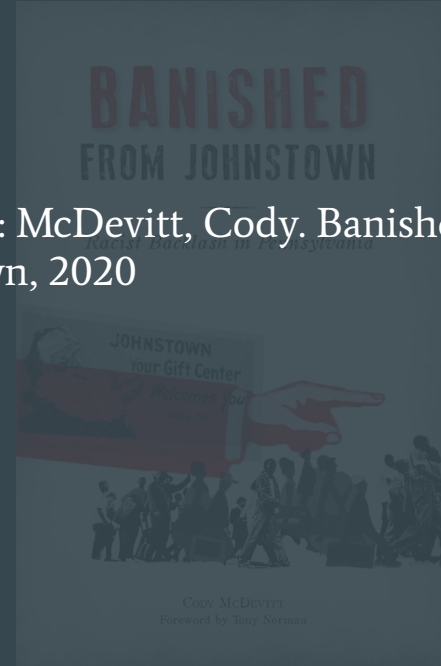
## 2. Determine Term Fits LCSH

- Conforms to existing structure (per the Subject Headings Manual)
- Refer to SHM [H 187 When to Establish a New Topical Subject Heading](#)
  - Represents a discrete, identifiable concept
  - Reflects current American usage
  - Establish term when first encountered in a work

# 3. Find Reference Sources

Cite work which prompted the heading >>

Work cat: McDevitt, Cody. Banished from Johnstown, 2020





# 3. Find Reference Sources, continued

- Cite 2-3 strong, authoritative sources
- Demonstrate usage and meaning >>
- Provide variant forms of term >>
- Refer to [H 0202 Authority Research for Subject Heading Proposals](#)

Encyclopedia of African American history, 1896 to the present, 2009, viewed Jun. 24, 2020 \$b **Sundown Towns** ("Some [sundown] towns in the West drove out their Chinese Americans even earlier, between 1885 and 1920. A few excluded Native Americans or Mexican Americans. 'Sundown suburbs' developed a little later, mostly between 1900 and 1968. Many suburbs kept out not only African Americans but also Jews"; "sundown communities")

Sonneborn, L. The great Black migrations, 2010: |b p. 13 ("Many towns and cities passed ordinances prohibiting blacks from dwelling within their borders. Blacks were permitted to enter these areas, usually to work menial jobs, only during the day ... As a result, these all-white areas were called sunset towns")

## 4. Write a Scope Note

- Scope notes tell catalogers and users how to use a term >>
- Add when term is not self-explanatory
- Should be neutral in tone and fit sources

*Here are entered works on cities, towns, and suburbs in the United States which banned non-white or non-Christian residents from residing or remaining after sunset.*

# Sundown Towns: Draft Proposal >> Approved

**Heading:** Sundown towns

**Variant(s):**

- Sundown communities
- Sundown suburbs
- Sunset towns
- Approved LCSH version:  
<https://lccn.loc.gov/sh2020006003>

**Scope note:**

Here are entered works on cities, towns, and suburbs in the United States which banned non-white or non-Christian residents from residing or remaining after sunset.

# Additional Proposal Instructions

- Final version
  - Add Broader/Narrower/Related Terms so term is not “orphaned”
  - Locate additional variants
  - If needed, cite references where term *is not* found
- More details at [SHM](#)
  - [H 200 Preparation of Subject Heading Proposals](#)

# Submitting Subject Proposals

1. Input in MARC forms:
  - a. SACO/NACO member: Add in ClassWeb
  - b. Non-PCC: Fill in form Subject Authority Proposal Form for Non-PCC Institutions
2. Notify LC:
  - a. SACO/NACO member: Email proposal number to saco@loc.gov
  - b. Non-PCC: Email form to policy@loc.gov

# SACO Review Process

1. Proposal added to the [Tentative List](#)
2. LCSH Editorial Group holds public [subject editorial meeting](#)
3. LC posts [Summary of Decisions](#) and [LCSH Approved Lists](#)
4. Add new term to your catalog

# What Can You Do?

- Become a SACO member, join a funnel, or start a funnel
- Keep an eye out for headings that are missing from LCSH, or existing headings that could be improved
- Remember that improving LCSH is difficult but possible
- Don't assume that because there's no heading, there can't be one

# Why this Work is Important

- LCSH is widely used in library catalogs
- Greater impact than implementing local policies



# Thank you!

More information on the funnel: <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/aframerfun.html>

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