

February 10, 2006

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Dear Colleague,

While relieved that "neither the State Department nor any other executive branch agency has in any way been involved with or 'interfered' with the Library" concerning the replacement of the primary subject heading, ARMENIAN MASSACRES, 1915-1923 with ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, 1915-1923, I am nonetheless dismayed^{that} the decision to reform a palpably inaccurate and outdated LCSH descriptor for an historical event should depend on the outcome of pending Congressional resolutions. Forgive my youthful idealism, but I had imagined that determination of subject heading language was a professional and intellectual, not political, process.

Although IC, as I noted in my 1-11-06 letter to James H. Billington, is surely the "Library of Congress," since when does that signify that Congress--rather than IC's own subject specialists--should dictate the form of IC subject headings? If executive agency tampering in subject cataloging is unconscionable (and it is), so is Congressional tampering. Moreover, the essentially passive approach manifest in your 2-3-06 communication, can--and likely will--result in the perpetuation of an imprecise and unscholarly representation of those 1915-1923 events. (There is, of course, no assurance that Senate or House will ever pass those pending resolutions. And I dearly hope that --in any event--Senators and Representatives do not wish to arrogate to themselves the power to dictate the formation of library subject headings. That's the business and responsibility of librarians, not legislators.)

The new "see" reference from "Armenian Genocide" to "Armenian Massacres" does not mitigate the elemental truth that the primary heading is wrong, its correction apparently being held hostage to both passivity and political deference.

With best wishes,


Sanford Berman

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cc: Sen. Mark Dayton
Sen. Norm Coleman
Rep. Jim Ramstad