



OUR STORIES, OUR SHELVES

MLA • DLA Conference 2026

African American Subject Headings Funnel Project

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Presentation Outline

- Description of the African American Funnel Project
 - History
 - Structure
 - Purpose
- Outline of Process for Creating and Submitting Subject Heading Proposals
- Current Work and Case Studies
- Ways to get involved



What is a Subject Heading?

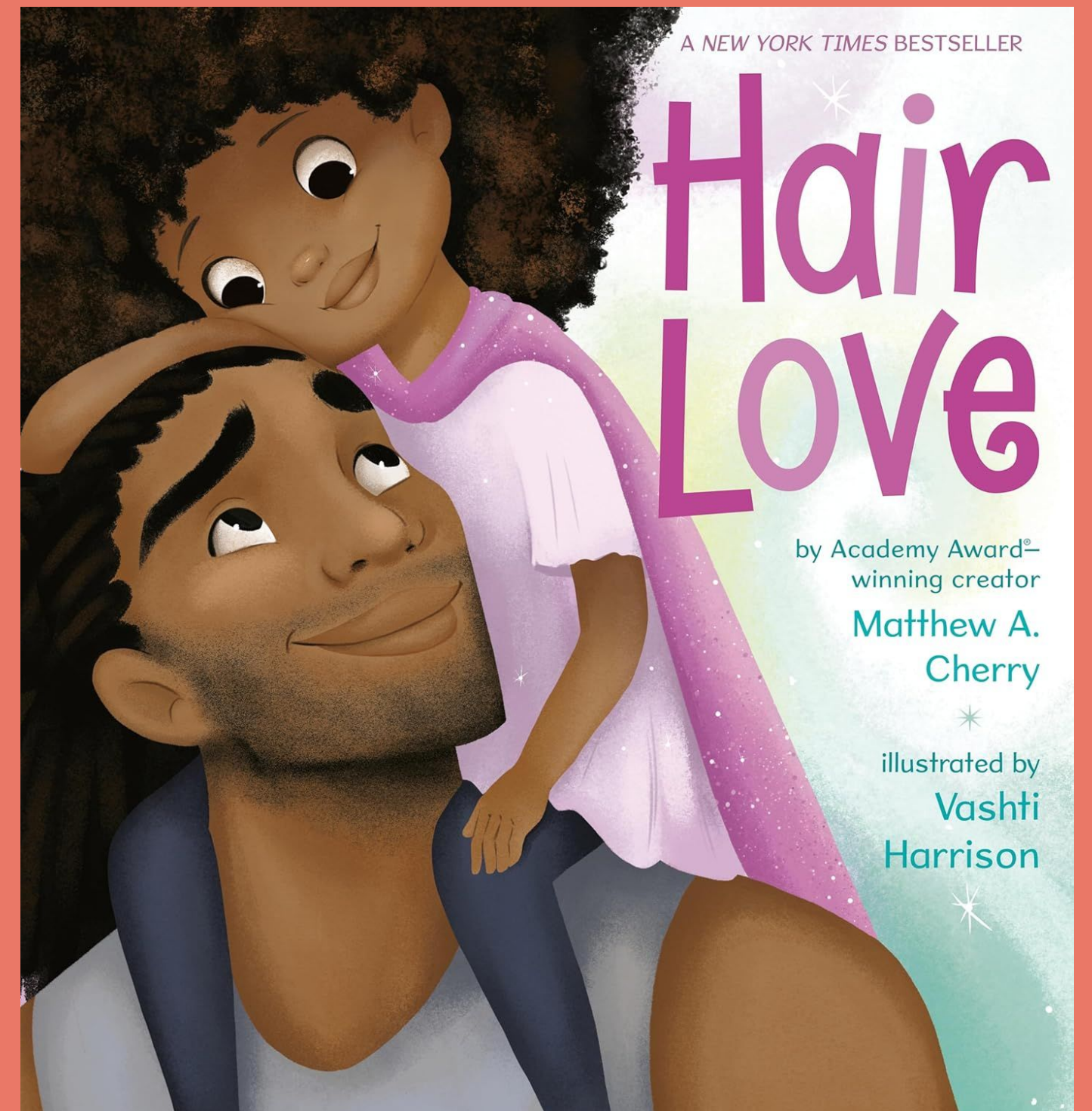
SUBJECT

Fathers and daughters — Juvenile fiction.

Hairstyles — Juvenile fiction.

African Americans — Juvenile fiction.

American fiction — African American authors.



What is a SACO Funnel?

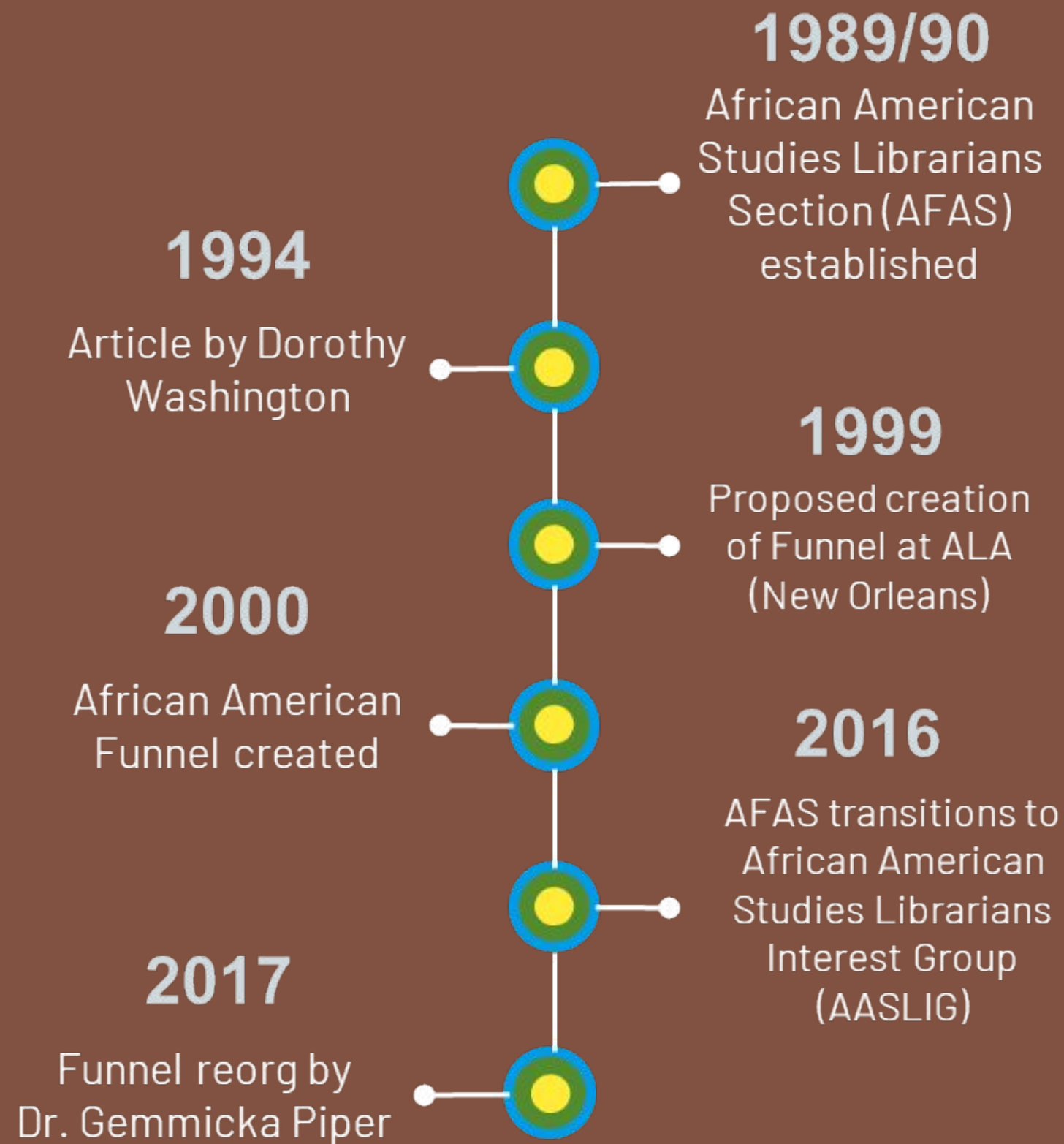
A group of librarians that work across institutions to improve Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) related to a particular subject.

The [African American Subject Funnel Project](#) works to improve LC headings related to African American history and culture.

We actively advocate for changes to the LCSH. We recognize that given the manner in which subject authorities developed over time that there is much work to be done.



African American Subject Funnel Project History



ED 413 923 , IR 056 755

AUTHOR Washington, Dorothy Ann
 TITLE Are the Standards Adequate for Organizing African American
 Studies Resources?
 PUB DATE 1994-00-00
 NOTE 15p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Access to Information; *Bibliographic Records; *Black
 Literature; *Black Studies; Blacks; *Cataloging; Ethnic
 Studies; *Library Catalogs; *Library Collections; Library
 Technical Processes; Standards; User Needs (Information)
 IDENTIFIERS African Americans; Library of Congress; MARC; New York
 Public Library; *Schomburg Collection

ABSTRACT Standards of bibliographic organization often are inadequate
 for those libraries with extensive African American studies collections or
 those with active user groups. This essay identifies areas where the
 standards are least effective. The experiences of the staff at the Schomburg
 Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, provide
 useful insight into various problems associated with the organization of
 African American studies collections. The Cataloging Unit at the Schomburg
 Center continues to find it necessary to enhance Library of Congress
 bibliographic records for African American materials. Too often records are
 not assigned relevant subject headings to reflect the Black experience.
 Reasons for a lack of Black-related subject headings being assigned to
 relevant records vary. Some occurrences could be due to insensitivity on the
 part of the cataloger or unfamiliarity with Library of Congress policy.
 Several libraries have expressed support for assigning Black-related subject
 headings that designate the ethnicity of the subject. Another concern is in
 the area of cross references and explanatory notes. Within the past two
 years, the Cataloging Unit has processed numerous works about free Blacks for
 which the Library of Congress MARC record only has the general subject
 heading "AFRO-AMERICANS." Subject access to individual works of fiction is
 another area of concern in regard to adequate access. Examples are provided
 of Library of Congress MARC (DLC) records without relevant subject headings
 and corresponding catalog records enhanced with relevant subject headings by
 the Schomburg Center Cataloging Unit. The paper concludes with suggestions
 for improvement. (Contains 17 references.) (AEF)

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 * from the original document. *

African American Subject Funnel Membership & Structure

Current Membership

Structure

- Monthly All-Group Meetings
- Periodic Working Meetings
- Monthly Outreach Meetings
- Active Listserv
- Google Group for Document Sharing
- 100% Volunteer Drive; Participate when you can!



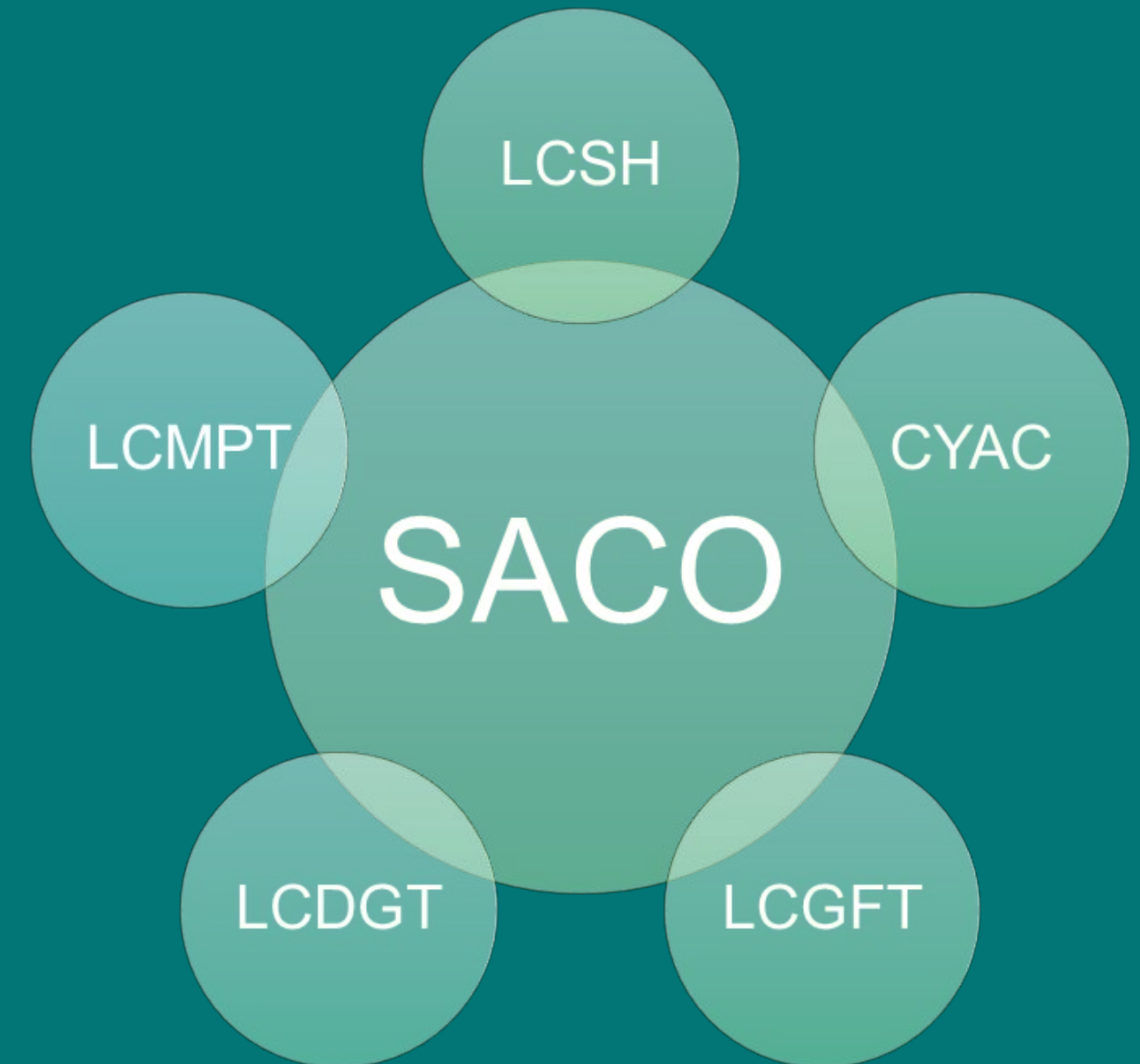
African American Subject Funnel Responsibilities

- Identifying and creating new Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) related to African American history and culture.
- Amending existing LCSH related to African American history and culture.
- Providing a forum for the exchange of ideas related to African American subject headings.
- Developing and supporting guidelines and best practices for members.
- Collaborating and sharing information with partner professional organizations.

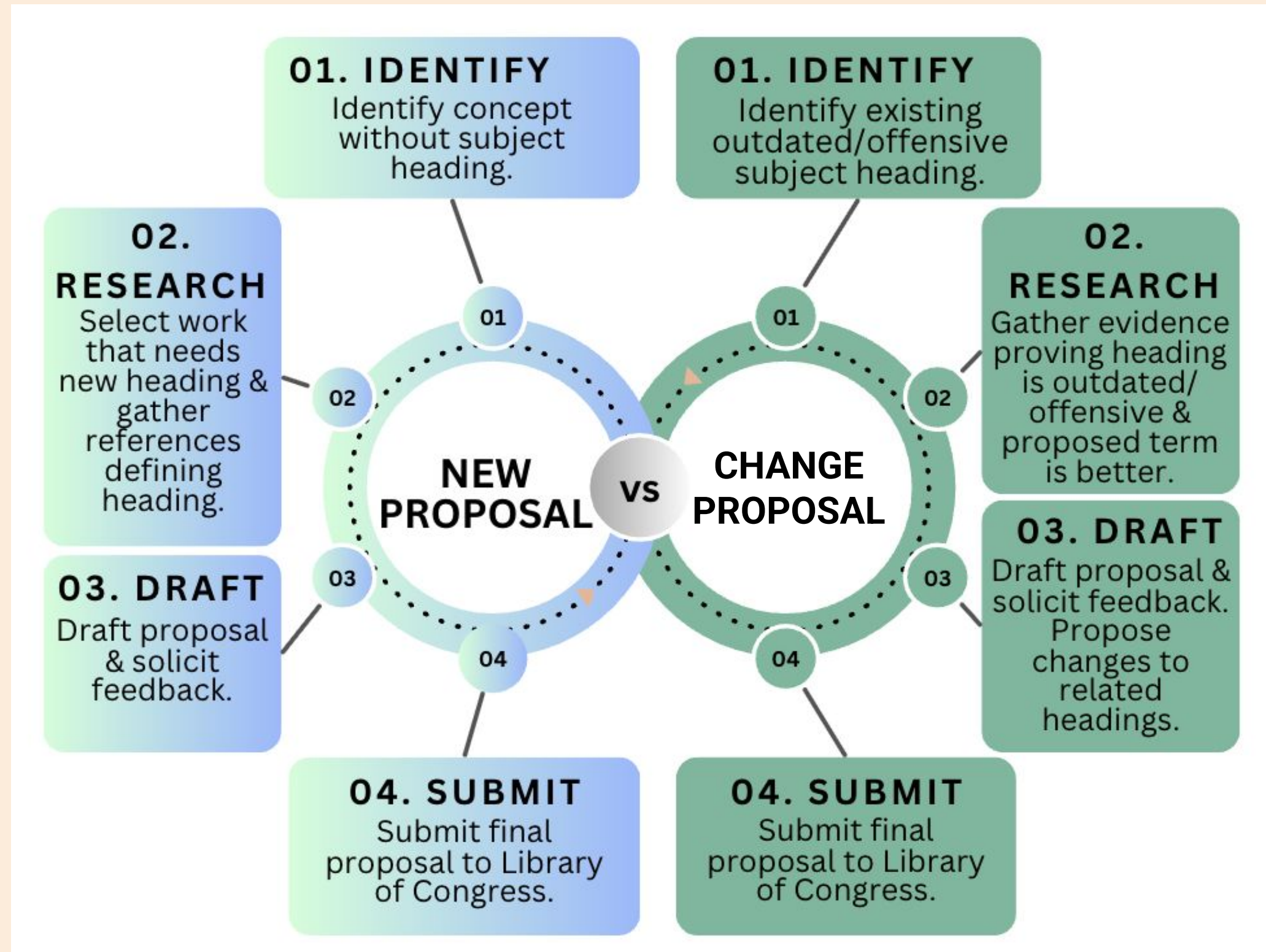


SACO Funnels

- Groups of libraries or individual members who have joined together to contribute to the SACO Program
- Organized around subject matter or geographically
 - SACO Music
 - SACO Gender and Sexuality
 - SACO Slavic
 - SACO Canada
 - SACO Hawaii/Pacific
 - SACO Law
- [List of SACO Funnel](#)

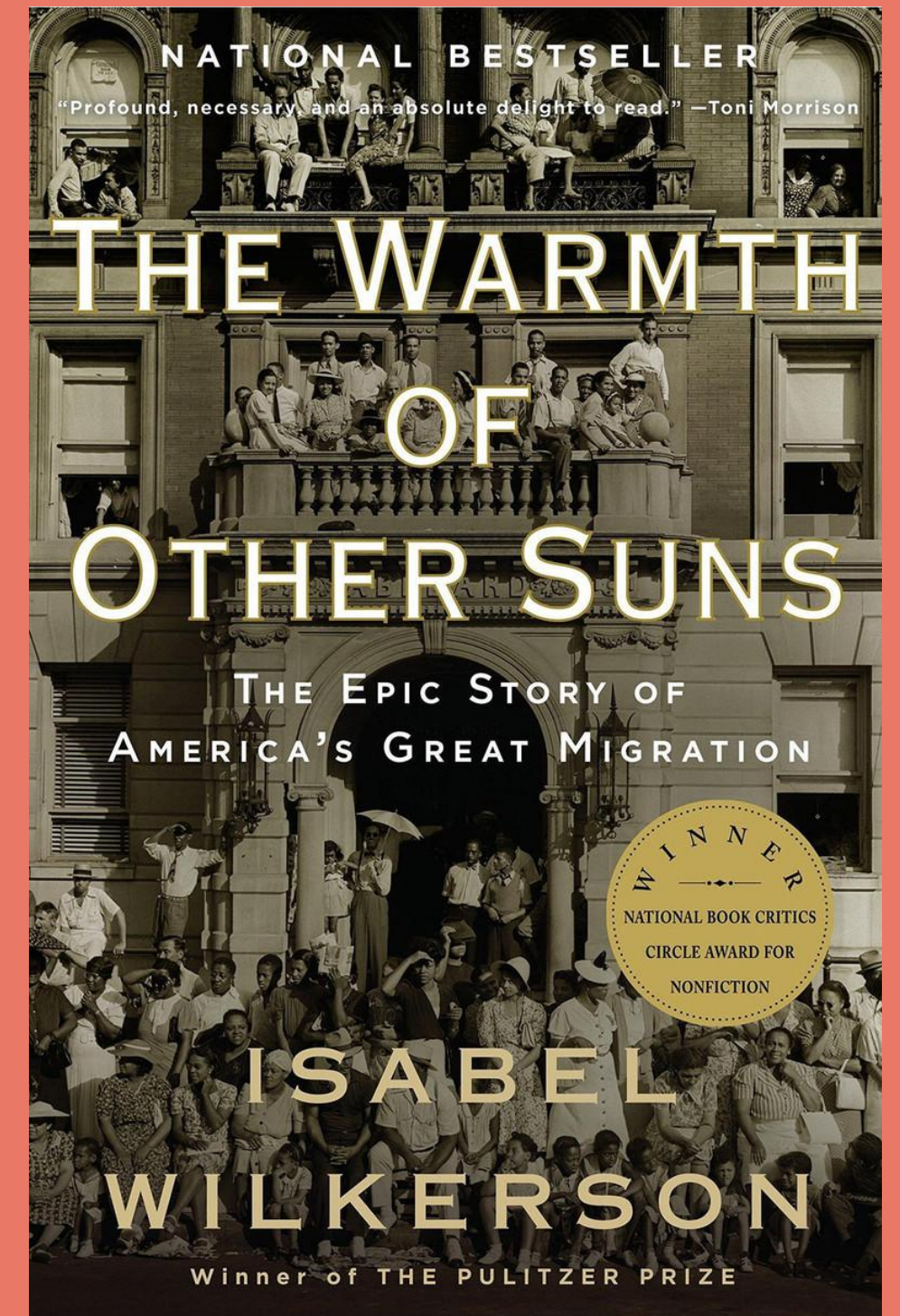


Creating Proposals



Case Study #1: New heading proposed for Great Migration

- Books on the Great Migration would get subject headings for:
 - African Americans--Migrations--History-- 20th century
 - Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century
- No subject headings for this specific concept



Case Study #1: New heading proposed for Great Migration



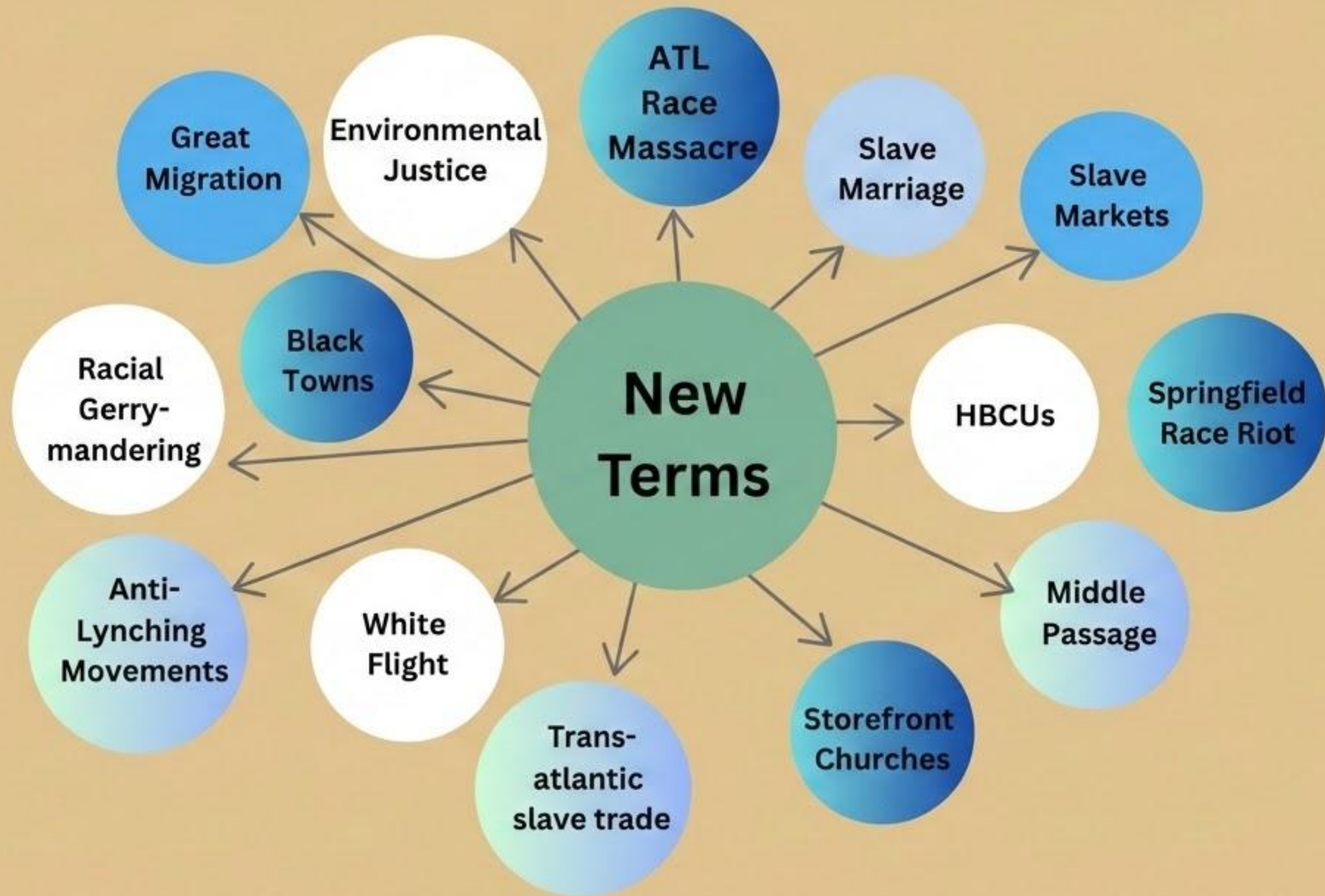
- Needed for a proposal:
 - A work being cataloged to justify the need for this heading
 - Reference sources defining the concept
- “Cataloged Work”: Marking our way home : the Great Migration and the Black American dream, by Blair Imani
- Reference Sources: Britannica online, Race and Ethnicity in America
- New heading added: **Great Migration, ca. 1914-ca. 1970**

Case Study #2: Change proposal for **Black** → **Black people**

- Funnel members felt the heading **Blacks** was offensive and out of date
- Needed for a proposal:
 - Evidence showing that the existing terms is widely considered out of date and offensive
 - Evidence showing that the new proposed term is better
- Citation from Merriam-Webster and the National Association of Black Journalists style guide recommending “Black people” over “Blacks”

Case Study #2: Change proposal for **Black** → **Black people**

- Change proposals get complicated
- We also changed **Whites**→**White people**
- Well over 100 records needed to be updated
 - Base headings (**Blacks, Whites**)
 - Narrower terms such as **Urban Blacks**→**Urban Black people**
 - Children's subject headings for the same terms
- Project team broke up the list and entered the proposals
- Worked closely with the Library of Congress throughout the process



Challenges

- Reaching a consensus on the relevance and importance of the term to Black Studies
- Identifying appropriate supportive documentation for proposing the revision or addition
- Formatting the submission correctly
- Evaluating feedback from proposals that are changed or not accepted by the Library of Congress [i.e. “White Flight”]
- Debating resubmission of rejected terms
- Recruitment, retention, and training of members



Join the Funnel or Learn More

Visit our [LibGuide](#)

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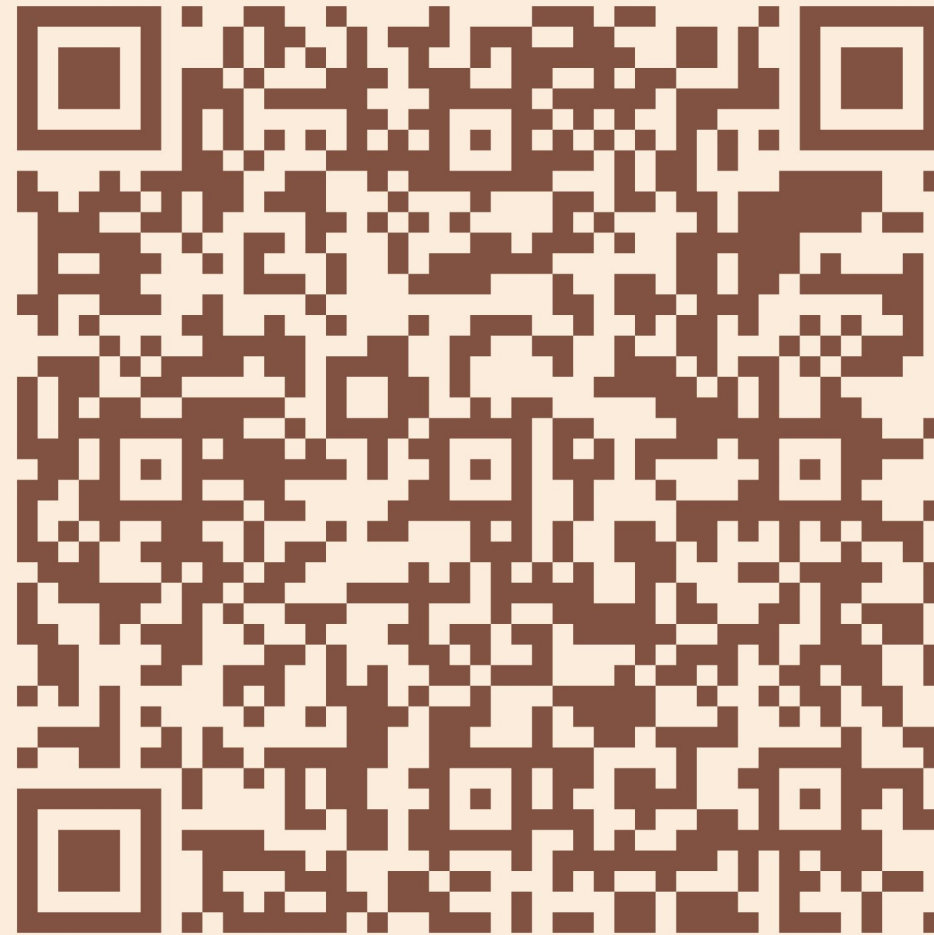


Thank you!

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*Thanks to Michelle Cronquist, Glenda Alvin,
Chereeka Garner, Kaylin Blount, Michele Fenton, Erica Bruchko, and Desiree Stukes as this
presentation has built on their work.*

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