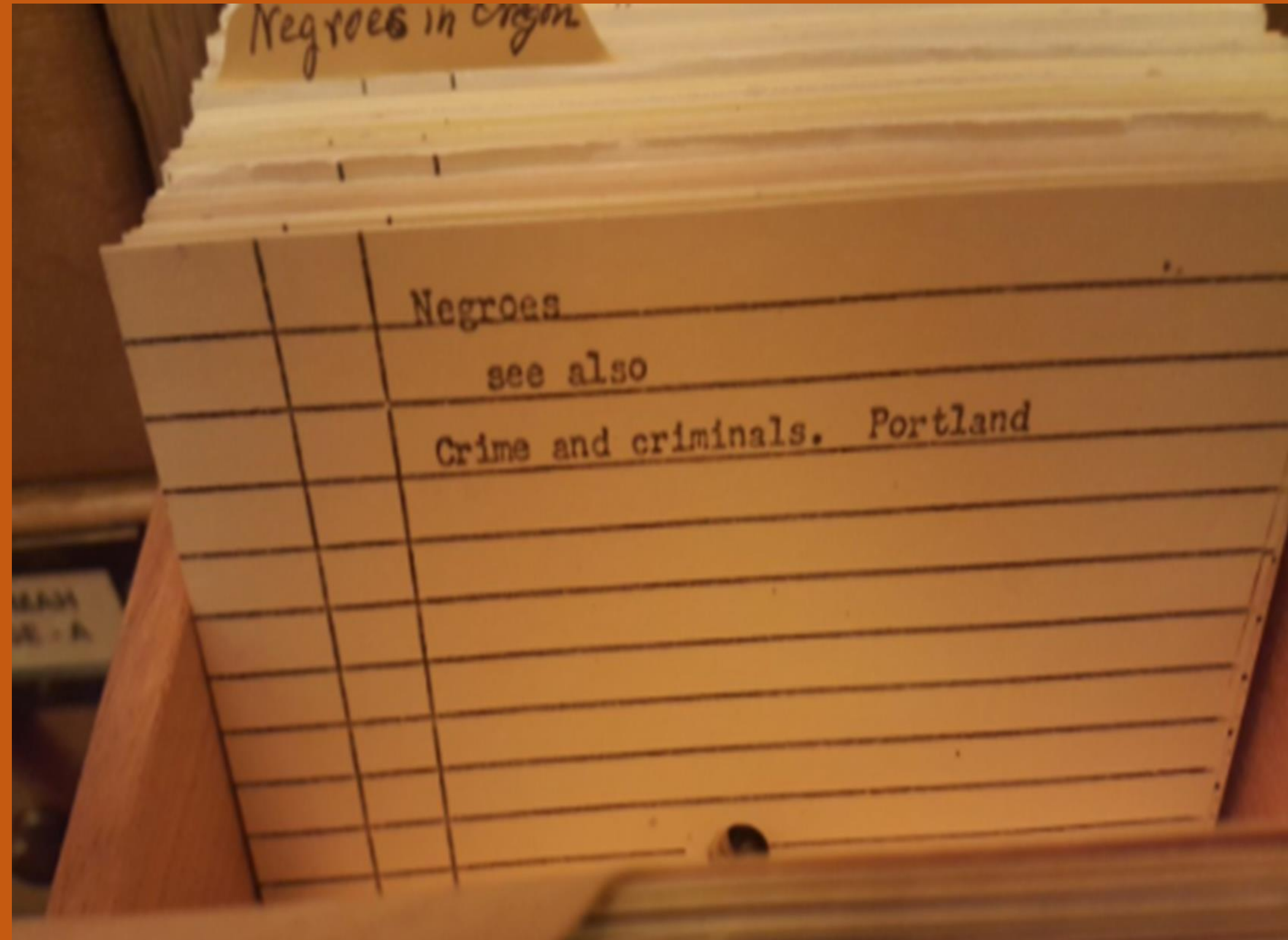


Non-Bias Cataloging: Libraries Can Help Change How People Think and Feel about Each Other

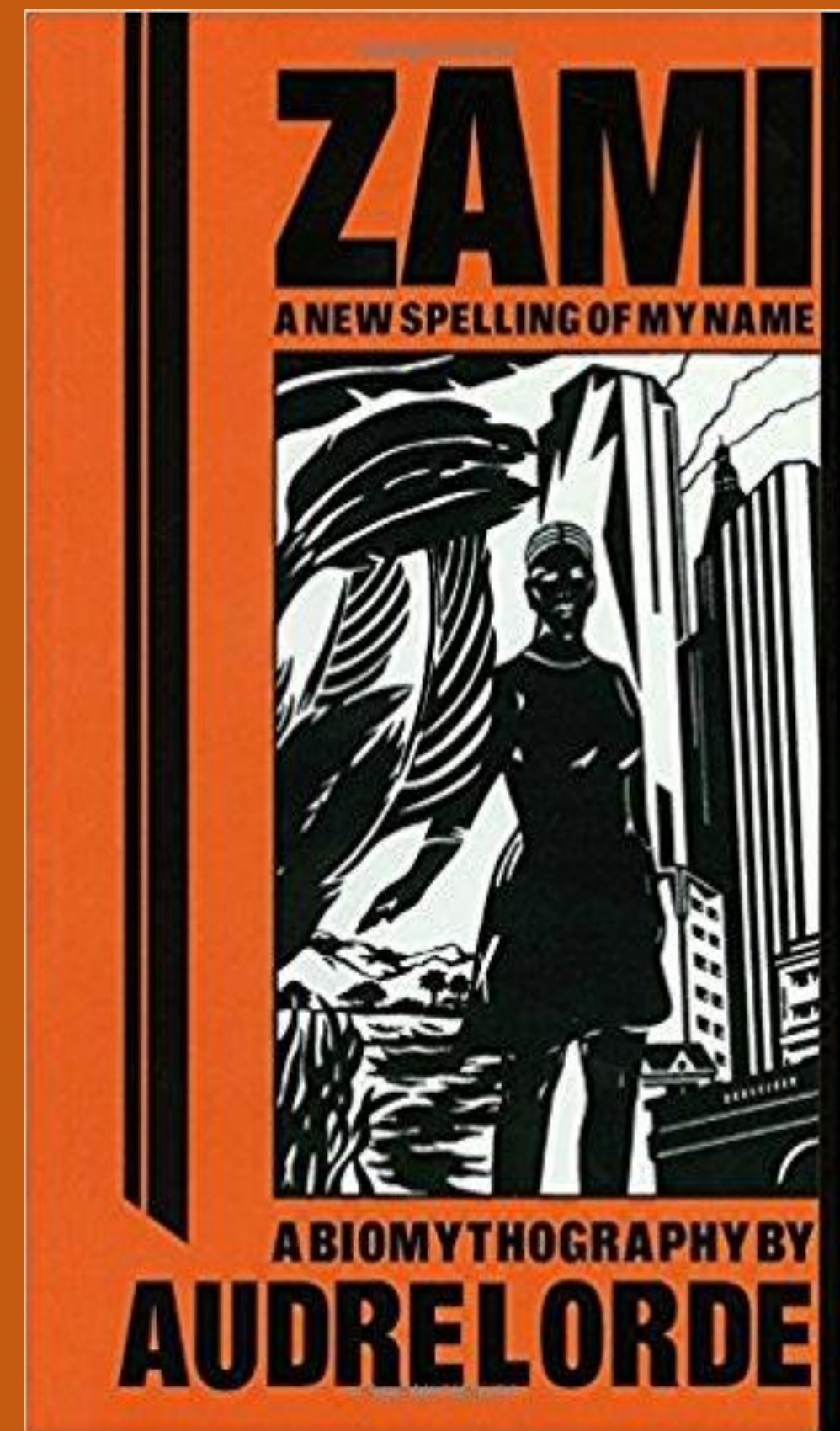
The Issue: Language, Social Perception, and the Library Catalog

- Research¹ shows that our language reflects the social values of the larger community or overarching social system in which we live
- Our language carries hierarchies that inform users of the language how we think and feel about our environment
- The Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal System make use of this language, thereby perpetuating racial and class biases, while immigrants and children, for example, use the system to acclimate to the culture of the community



The Project: Alternative subject terms

- Black Feminist Library (BFL) is a small, Seattle-based collection of literature by Black Feminist authors. Some items are unavailable at Seattle public libraries, others are mislabeled using bias language of the Dewey Decimal System (DDC)
- A thesaurus was created using nonbiased subject terms to catalog BFL
- The result is a beginning to a richer understanding of people, culture, and literature
- For example:
 - DDC listing for *Zami, A New Spelling to My Name* → 20th Century American Literature and Miscellany (818.5 LOR)
 - Alternative listing → “Biomythography”: Autobiography, myth, history, and cultural practice
- Other authors whose works fall under biomythography include Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison



Concrete Outcomes for BFL

- A more efficient means of browsing the library
- An author search will now include essays and short story titles
- Authors are identifiable by nationality or country of self-proclaimed belongingness
- Authors' considerations for their work are used- e.g. spelling bell hooks' name in the lower case
- Subject terms make subjects browsable by author
- Age range suggestions (in order to challenge and trust young people with knowledge and information written with them in mind) is relaxed

What This Could Achieve for Everyone

- Change the way we see each other and the inferences we make about cultural differences
- Create means for dialogue towards social equity
- Help us reconsider how to educate children and people learning American English, and, eventually, people using DDC in other countries
- “Make humanity more human²”

¹Fridland, Valerie (2015). *Language and Society: What Your Speech Says About You: Does Language Influence Worldview?* [Audiobook lecture].

²This is a description given of the UW MLIS program at graduate orientation 9/24-9/27/15; it really stuck with me. <https://www.instagram.com/p/8CA9nKkCV/>