

SAY THIS, NOT THAT!

Some of these outdated terms should be left in the past, or revised at the very least as many common terms and phrases are actually rooted in racist, sexist, or generally distasteful language. Idioms often have hidden histories that can give you greater insight into the complexities of race and racism. Being more mindful about the language you use in everyday life actually empowers you to make changes that are easy to practice. **Below are the 30 most popular phrases with shockingly racist meanings.**

“Peanut gallery”: Critics

Why you should stop using it: It’s a classist phrase that refers to the cheapest, worst seats in a theater. It can also be construed as racist since the cheap seats were the only seats Black Americans were allowed to purchase in the early- to mid-1900s. Cheap balcony seats were reserved for or largely made up of African American patrons, thus since the phrase implied that the opinions expressed by those from the gallery were unsolicited and unhelpful.

Alternative: “Audience or heckler”

“Grandfathered in”: An old law continues to apply in certain situations instead of the new law

Why you should stop using it: The original grandfather clause was used in the American South to deny black people the right to vote, stating that only people who could vote before 1866 and their descendants were exempt from educational, property, or tax requirements for voting.

Alternative: “The old rules apply”

"Picnic": An outing or occasion that involves taking a packed meal to be eaten outdoors

Why you should stop using it: Although not taught in American learning institutions and literature, it is noted in most Black history professional circles and literature that the origin of the term “picnic” derives from the acts of lynching African-Americans. The word “picnic” is rooted in the whole theme of “Pick A Ni**er.” This is where individuals would “pic” a Black person to lynch and make this into a family gathering. There would be music and a “picnic.” (“Nic” being the white acronym for “ni**er.”)

Alternative: “Gathering or barbeque”

“Blacklist”: To avoid or exclude

Why you should stop using it: Any language that reinforces the symbolism of white as pure and good, and black as dirty and bad, needs to be re-examined.

Alternative: “Boycott or ostracize”

“Uppity”: Self-Important or Arrogant

Why you should stop using it: During Segregation racist southerners used "uppity" to describe Black people "who didn't know their place," socioeconomically speaking. Originally, the term started within the Black community, but the racists adopted it pretty quickly.

Alternative: “Audacious or impudent”

“The itis”: Drowsiness after eating a big meal

Why you should stop using it: “The itis” originates from the word “ni**eritis”. It is used to describe the lethargic, sleepy feeling an individual gets after eating a large meal. It helped reinforce the stereotype that black Americans were lazy.

Alternative: “Food Coma, postprandial sleepiness, or somnolence”

“Inner City”: The area near the center of a city

Why you should stop using it: It may sound like a simple geographic reference—“he’s from the inner city”—but in America, this phrase is often used as coded language to describe African-Americans, with the implication of laziness, poverty, criminality, and dependence on welfare. In other words, it’s racist, judgmental, and unkind.

Alternative: Refer to the actual city or state someone lives in

“CakeWalk”: A dancing contest among African Americans in which a cake was awarded as a prize.

Why you should stop using it: Rooted in enslavement in the prewar South, some Black slaves were forced to spend Sundays dressing up and dancing in a way of ridiculing enslavers and the white upper classes. They competed for a cake, hence the name. Regarded as fun and leisurely weekend activity, “cakewalk” became associated with easy tasks.

Alternative: “This is simple or I got this”

“Crack the whip”: Behave in a domineering and demanding way toward one's subordinates.

Why you should stop using it: The main method used to control the behavior of slaves was the threat of having them whipped. The number of lashes depended on the seriousness of the offense. As they knew that as blacks were unable to give testimony against white people in court, overseers knew that they were fairly safe in handing out these whippings.

Alternative: “Let’s get to work”

“Cracker/Redneck”: A derogatory term to describe white people

Why you should stop using it: This insult was first noted in the mid-18th century, making it older than the United States itself. It was used to refer to poor whites, particularly those inhabiting the frontier regions of Maryland, Virginia and Georgia. It emphasized that a person is poor and uneducated and comes from the backwoods with little awareness of and interaction with the modern world, while “white trash” – and the modern term “trailer trash” – emphasizes the person's supposed moral failings, without regard to the setting of their upbringing.

Alternative: “White person”

“Gyp” or “Gip”: Evolved as a shortened version of “gypsy”-more correctly known as the Romani, an ethnic group now mostly in Europe and America.

Why you should stop using it: The Romani typically traveled a lot and made their money by selling goods. Business disputes naturally arose, and the masses started thinking of Romani as swindlers.

Alternative: “Bamboozle or rip off”

“Go back to the Plantation”: An estate on which crops such as coffee, sugar, and tobacco are cultivated by resident labor.

Why you should stop using it: It was not until the 1600's that the word was defined as estates where the enslaved labored in bondage and were forced to grow crops. "Using the word 'plantation' romanticizes the old South, a slave economy when white people hear the word 'plantation' they may think of a big white house with pillars and southern oak trees. But when a Black person hears that word, it evokes a past of abuse and slavery."

Alternative: “Go back to the office or home”

“Ghetto”: Low class or acting poorly

Why you should stop using it: Physical ghettos were neighborhoods where Jewish people were segregated from the greater population. But “ghetto” also describes deficient manners and behavior, often referring to Black people.

Alternative: “Uncouth” or “unpolished”

“Guru”: A spiritual guide or leader

Why you should stop using it: In the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, the word is a sign of respect. Using it casually negates its original value.

Alternative: “Expert” or “teacher”

“Off the reservation”: To leave an Indian reservation to which one was restricted. To engage in disruptive activity outside normal bounds.

Why you should stop using it: Used during the 19th and 20th centuries in American politics, refers to Native Americans who were forced into treaties that limited their mobility by placing them on reservations, so off the reservation would suggest they were placing themselves outside their allowed their legal, or social, parameters. The phrase has very offensive roots as the Native American's who were found 'off the reservation' was killed.

Alternative: “Overstepped the limits” or “walked out”

“Paddy wagons”: Originated in the late 1700s as a shortened form of "Patrick," and then later a derogatory term for any Irishman. "Wagon" naturally refers to a vehicle. "Paddy wagon" either stemmed from a large number of Irish police officers or the perception that rowdy, drunken Irishmen constantly ended up in the back of police cars.

Why you should stop using it: The idea of 'paddy' is a police car that comes around to grab up Irish people who are no good drunk criminals, so it deals with a historical stereotype of Irish people as low lives.

Alternative: “Police car”

“Bugger”: Used to express annoyance or anger. Used as a term of abuse, typically for a man.

Why you should stop using it: When you call someone a "bugger," you're accusing them of being a sodomite, at least according to the original meaning. The term stemmed from the Bogomils, who led a religious sect during the Middle Ages called "Bulgarus." Through various languages, the

term morphed into "bugger." Many considered the Bogomils heretical and thus, said they approached sex in an "inverse way."

Alternative: Nuisance, pest or irritant

"Chop Chop!": Hurry up

Why you should stop using it: This phrase, comes from the Cantonese word kap, or "make haste." It is generally used condescendingly to someone the speaker considers to be below them in status, which only worsens the fact that it's making fun of the pidgin English spoken by Chinese immigrants.

Alternative: "We need to get this done quickly"

"Eskimo": Comes from the same Danish word borrowed from Algonquin, "ashkimeq," which literally means "eaters of raw meat."

Why you should stop using it: Either way, when we refer to an entire group of people by their perceived behaviors, we trivialize their existence and culture. It is a name given to a group by another group and its continued use perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

Alternative: Let's start using the proper terms, like Inuit.

"Sold down the river": "Betrays or cheats you".

Why you should stop using it: The phrase has a much darker and more literal meaning. During slavery in the US, masters in the North often sold their misbehaving slaves, sending them down the Mississippi River to plantations in Mississippi, where conditions were much harsher.

Alternative: "Betray" or "mislead."

"Eenie meenie miney moe": This phrase comes from a longer children's rhyme:

Eenie, meenie, miney, moe / Catch a tiger by the toe / If he hollers let him go / Eenie, meenie miney, moe.

Why you should stop using it: This modern, inoffensive version comes from a similar, older one, where ni**er replaces tiger.

Alternative: Sing a different song

"Long time no see":

What it means: It has been a while!

Why you should stop using it: It derives from the broken English used by non-native English-speakers. Meant to be funny, this particular phrase mocks the way that Native Americans and Chinese speak English.

Alternative: "It has been too long!" or "We haven't spoken in ages!"

"No can do": I can't do it.

Why you should stop using it: This short, snappy phrase, often used as a lighthearted negative response to a request, originated as a racist way for people to mock the broken English spoken by Chinese immigrants to America in the early 20th century.

Alternative: "I'm unable to do it."

“Mumbo Jumbo”: Confusion or bewilderment.

Why you should stop using it: This expression derives from the name of Maamajombo, a character often portrayed by a male dancer in West African Mandinka cultural ceremonies. British explorers in the 1730s got his name wrong and found him terrifying and grotesque and the rituals meaningless, hence the derogatory use of the name to indicate that something is “unintelligible nonsense.”

Alternative: “I cannot understand”, “Gibberish”, “Nonsense”.

“Fuzzy Wuzzy”: Refers to curly textured hair

Why you should stop using it: Sounds cute and cuddly, like the teddy bear in the nursery rhyme, right? British colonial soldiers in the 1800s used this racist expression to refer mockingly to East African nomads, who had curly hair and dark skin.

Alternative: “Cute, Cuddly, Soft”

“Cotton-picking”: Cotton harvester

Why you should stop using it: “Just a cotton-picking minute!” Even Bugs Bunny used this expression, but its history is bleak as cotton was picked almost exclusively by black slaves in the southern United States.

Alternative: “Blasted or Damn,”

“Jew him Down”: Get him to lower the price

Why you should stop using it: Anti-Semitism, unfortunately, certainly hasn’t disappeared since the horrific events of the Second World War. The phrase “Jew (him or her) down” is still used to refer to bargaining with someone for a lower price; it comes from very old, offensive stereotypes of Jewish people as shrewd moneylenders who always haggled over the cost of something.

Alternative: “Negotiate or bargain”

“Oriental”: Eastern

Why you should stop using it: The problem with referring to people from East Asia as “Oriental” is that it implies that they are different: not Western, not white, and somehow “lesser than.” East Asians have never referred to themselves as Orientals: nor should anyone. Rugs are oriental, not people.

Alternative: “Asian or their specific nationality”

“Thug”: Gangster or Criminal

Why you should stop using it: Although this word originated in India and meant “ruffian” or “troublemaker,” it’s now used primarily in a negative context by white people to label younger black people, particularly men, as violent, irrational, untrustworthy, or gang members. The label is often applied based on how the person dresses, looks, or speaks, rather than by their actions.

Alternative: “Troublemaker, rowdy or bully”

“Hip hip hooray”: An exclamation of praise, congratulations or celebration

Why you should stop using it: "Hip-hip hooray" developed from the German "hep hep," (which was a harmless call shepherds would use when herding their sheep). But during the Holocaust, German citizens started using it as a rallying shout when they would hunt down and kill Jewish citizens. And the phrase's anti-Semitic undertones go as far back as 1819, with the Hep Hep riots, a time of both Jewish emancipation from the German Confederation and communal violence against German Jews.

Alternative: “Bravo or congratulations”

***BONUS: The Racist History of The Ice Cream Truck Song (*Yes, our beloved ice cream truck jingle.*)**

[The Racist History of The Ice Cream Truck Song | Genius News - YouTube](#)

““We need to dig deeper and understand where the phrases and words we use come from because if we don't we are being complicit in perpetuating the racist systems that are embedded in our language.” “We need to dig deeper and understand where the phrases and words we use come from because if we don't we are being complicit in perpetuating the racist systems that are embedded in our language.” – *Jeffrey Barg, Philadelphia Inquirer columnist*

RESOURCES:

<https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/racist-language-and-origins-i-didn-t-35616/>

https://www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/social-justice-phrase-guide?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=idealist

<https://www.businessinsider.com/offensive-phrases-that-people-still-use-2013-11>

<https://www.mic.com/articles/141124/5-everyday-phrases-that-actually-have-racist-origins>

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/culturally-offensive-phrases-you-should-use-at>

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/words-and-phrases-to-stop-using>

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/commonly-terms-racist-origins/story?id=71840410>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/25-expressions-with-racist-origins-you-should-stop-saying/ss-BB1eDO0u#image=14> (link is no longer working)

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