

Language Matters

All Lives Matter – Although some believe that it means that all human life should be valued, what it fails to see is that society and systems do not value Black people equally.

Boy – Slur in the context of racial bigotry toward black men.

Brave – Has been used to refer to First Nations men and dehumanizes and equates Native males to something less than a man.

Cakewalk – Rooted in enslavement in the antebellum South. The cakewalk was originally performed by enslaved people and judged by plantation owners, with the winner awarded with cake. It was originally a processional dance with comical formality and also developed as subtle mockery of white upper class.

Call a Spade a Spade – Derogatory slur for a black person.

Chief – Commonly given as a nickname which incorrectly labels Native American men. Native leaders were highly disrespected in the US, so calling someone 'chief' is a way to continue to disrespect. Additionally, American Indian leaders were referred to as headmen or clan mother, not chief.

Eenie Meenie Miney Mo – While its earliest origins are unclear, this rhyme was well-known in the days of slavery in the United States. You're probably familiar with the version that goes, "Eenie meenie miney mo / Catch a tiger by the toe," but in a previous version of the song, the n-word was used instead of "tiger." [It's thought](#) that this was sung to describe what slave owners would do if they caught a runaway.

Grandfather Clause or Grandfathered In – Usually means that something is allowed to continue operating under old rules, but going forward, new rules need to be abided by. This term was born from a racist post-Reconstruction political strategy to exclude black people the right to vote.

Gypsy/Gyp – Commonly used term to describe Roma people that some have described people who are free-spirited or nomadic. It also promotes the stereotypes that Roma people were thieves and immoral and the word 'gyp' refers to cheat or con.

Hip-Hip Hooray – Developed from the German 'hep hep,' which was what shepherds called to herd their sheep. But during the Holocaust, German citizens started using it as a rallying cry to hunt down Jewish citizens.

Indian giver – American expression to describe a person who gives a gift, then later wants it back or wants something in return. Based on the trades between early European settlers and the Indigenous people.

Indian Style – Used to explain sitting cross-legged. It is associated with stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans.

Jimmies – Depending on where you're from, jimmies have been known to refer to sprinkles (sugary ice cream topping). However, jimmies also have a negative origin, where some believed the origin was

related to brown sprinkles “looking like Black people” while others believed that it came from the Jim Crow laws.

Long Time No See – Originally a way to mock Native Americans.

Low Hanging Fruit – Although stated by Mary-France Winters (author) that there is “no direct connection to lynching,” the term can be a reminder of this horrible act and “can invoke very different meanings for some.”

Master Bedroom/Bathroom – Although not having a direct tie to slavery, it has slavery-era connotations.

No Can Do – Originally a way to mock Chinese people.

Off the Reservation – In the 1800s, the federal government forcibly removed Native Americans from their land and sent them to live in designated reservations. The phrase “off the reservation” was used in government correspondence to report on whether Native Americans were complying with orders to stay within their designated living areas. Over time, it came to be used to describe anyone acting outside of what is expected, particularly in political situations.

Paddy Wagon – Paddy is a shortened name for Patrick and the term ‘paddy wagon’ has been used as a stereotype that Irishmen are rowdy alcoholics who spend much of their time in the back of police cars.

Peanut Gallery – Sometimes refers to hecklers or critics. Previously referred to the balconies of segregated theaters; where African Americans had to sit. (and where does the ‘peanut’ piece come from? – peanuts were introduced to America during the slave trade and were often associated with black people).

Redskin – Slang for Native Americans in the United States and First Nations in Canada. In its origin, it refers to the bloody scalps of Native people.

Savage – The U.S. Declaration of Independence refers to the Indigenous people as “merciless Indian Savages.”

Sold Down the River – Usually means that someone betrayed you in a major way, but in American slavery, the term was quite literal, referring to the Mississippi or Ohio rivers, where enslaved people would be ‘sold down the river’ and transported to plantations further south.

Squaw – Has been used to refer to First Nations women. It is equated to calling a Native woman a whore.

Tipping Point – Has been used to describe the point of no return. It was applied to “white flight” in the 1950s, as white people abandoned urban areas for suburbs and journalists began using the phrase in relation to the percentage of minority neighbors it took to trigger this reaction.

Tonto – Derives from the Spanish language and translated to mean stupid, idiot, or fool.

The Itis – Refers to a racist stereotype of lethargy to be associated with black Americans.

Thug – Refers to a violent person or criminal, but often takes on a racist connotation to describe black people.

Uppity – Something that white southerners used to call black people who behaved as if they didn't know their place in the racial hierarchy.