

STICKS AND STONES . . .

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In years past, as a self-confidence morale booster, groups of people would coin derogatory names for those outside the group. Since dictionaries record the language, many of these opprobrious names and terms have become legitimate words. But what man puts in, man may take out. And, we say, modern society no longer tolerates these bastardizations. Logologists -- who is better equipped than you to revise the dictionary?

People of mixed blood, the half-breeds, have eternally been castigated by their full-blooded brethren, the purebloods. For example, in South Carolina a TURK was someone with mixed white, Indian, or Negro blood. In India, a CHEE-CHEE was a Eurasian half-caste.

Simply being from another country or speaking another language was sufficient for the hatemongers: BOCHE (German), CHINK (Chinese), DAGO (Italian or Spaniard), FROG (Frenchman), GREASEBALL (Mexican), GUGU (Filipino), JAP (Japanese), KIKE (Jew), MICK (Irishman), POLACK (Polish), SIWASH (American Indian), SPIK (Mexican), and WOP (Italian).

Even a different area was sufficient for these maleficences. Anyone not from Spain or Latin America was a GRINGO. To many Southerners (of the U. S. A.) a Northerner was a DAMNYANKEE. On the other hand, to certain Southerners, the "undesirable" whites were WHITE TRASH. The Negro was JIGABOO or NIGRA. In answer, from the Negro's viewpoint, there was HONKIE or WHITEY for the whites and UNCLE TOM for the "undesirable" blacks.

Religion also elicited such terms as MINISTER'S FACE (a hog's head with most parts removed) and POPE'S NOSE (rear end of a bird). And there were many terms degrading "foreigners": CHINAMAN'S CHANCE (barest possibility), DUTCH COURAGE (artificial stimulation), FRENCH LEAVE (go out without paying), and GREEK GIFT (treacherous present).

A few of these unspeakable words have become verbs. There were JEW (cheat by sharp practices) and WELSH (cheat by not paying).

Some terms confuse us. Is NIGGER HEAVEN more offensive to Negroes than to theater owners? And HONEST INJUN may, or may not, be loathsome to an Indian. Certainly NIGGER IN THE WOODPILE is not complimentary to the Negro; but neither is SNAKE IN THE GRASS to a reptile. As for DOG'S LIFE, you should meet our dog.

And how about PARTY GIRL (a prostitute) versus PARTY MAN (an adherent of a political party)? Or SWEATER GIRL (one with a shapely bust) as opposed to SWEATER MAN (a petroleum worker who operates equipment for sweating oil from slack wax)? Why is there an UNDAUGHTERLINESS but no UNSONLINESS?

The aforementioned words are all in Webster's Unabridged, Third Edition. We have thrown down the gauntlet. Logologists -- what will you do about it?