

# THE LEXICON OF RACE IN AMERICA

IT'S NOT ALL JUST BLACK AND WHITE

\*lexicon: the vocabulary of a language

# Negro is not the “N”-word

“...in the 2000 Census, more than 56,000 people wrote in *Negro* to describe their identity...Some people, it seems, still strongly identify with the term, which used to be a perfectly polite designation.”

(Kiviat, Barbara. “Should the Census Be Asking People if They Are Negro?” Time. 23 Jan 2010. Web)

**“Colored” was polite, and then it was not:**

**“... ‘colored people’ is a vulgar racist term, but ‘people of color’ is the absolute epitome of politically-correct...”**

**(Skeet, Christopher. “People of Color.” Chicago Flame. College Media Network. April 3, 2010. Web)**

**“African-American” was academic,  
then fashionable...**

**In any event, the name that we use -**

**“...is at the root of a bitter national  
controversy over proper designation for  
identifiable Americans of African  
descent.”**

**(Bennett, Lerone, jr. “What’s in a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs.  
Black” Ebony 23. November 1967: 46 -48, 50-52, 54. Web)**

**“People of Color” is inclusive:**

**...or is it?**

**“Martin Luther King said something once about not judging people by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character...We all bleed red, we’re all American citizens and, most importantly, we’re equal human beings.”**

**(Skeet, Christopher. “People of Color.” Chicago Flame. College Media Network. April 3, 2010. Web)**

...and How about *that* “N”-word?

nigger

*noun*

1: NEGRO – usually taken to be offensive

2: a member of any dark skinned race –  
usually taken to be offensive

3: a member of a socially disadvantaged  
class of persons

Should we recognize ancestry and skin color, or just one or the other? What holds the most dignity? What is the best way to honor another person?

# As you watch this debate between scholars, consider:

Youtube "Funeral of the N-word"

- What does the word mean/can it mean different things?
- Who should use it (if anyone)?
- Can words be “owned”?
- Do words define how we feel about ourselves?



# **“What do you think?”**

- 1. Should schools continue to teach literary works where derogatory language is used?**
- 2. Should publishers re-issue books that contain derogatory language?**
- 3. Should students read words aloud in class that may be offensive to other students?**