12 Common Words & Phrases with Racist Origins or Connotations

Some seemingly innocuous terms in the English language have racist or otherwise problematic histories.
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Including additions from *https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/culturally-offensive-phrases-you-should-use-at*

1. "Peanut Gallery"	If second graders start to get chatty in their seats, the teacher might shout, "Quiet in the peanut gallery!" If someone is giving unsolicited advice in the comment section online or heckling in a theater, we might dismiss them as just complaints from the peanut gallery. It's a colorful phrase — and one that journalist Jeremy Helligar pointed out in Reader's Digest has "the fingerprints of Jim Crow and segregation" all over it. The "peanut gallery" was once used to refer to people — mostly Black people — who were sitting in the cheap seats in vaudeville theaters and would throw peanuts on stage if they didn't like a performance rather than throwing tomatoes. (Yes, throwing foodstuff on stage was once a thing. The first noted reference to throwing tomatoes after a bad performance came in an 1883 New York Times article describing actor John Ritchie being pelted with tomatoes and rotten eggs by the audience. "[A] large tomato thrown from the gallery struck him square between the eyes and he fell to the stage floor just as several bad eggs dropped upon his head." Tough crowd.) Some hold that "the peanut gallery" is more of a classist disparagement than anything else — but others say there's a racist implication. "The 'peanut gallery' was the cheapest and worst part of the theater, and the only option for Black attendees," the National Urban League said of the phrase in 2018. "No one wanted to sit in the peanut gallery and today, no one wants to hear from the peanut gallery."
2. "Grandfathered In" or "Grandfather Clause"	If a long-time customer is "grandfathered in," it means they're exempt from any new (typically more stringent) requirements or fees a company establishes. (For instance, "I'm grandfathered into a really sweet Hulu deal from a partnership they did a few months back with Spotify.") A "grandfather clause" exempts certain people or groups from the requirements of a piece of legislation affecting their rights, privileges or practices. The phrase has a racially charged history: Its origins go back to post-Civil War attempts to undercut the voting power of newly free Black people by creating strict requirements for new voters, including literacy tests, that did not apply to the descendants of those who voted prior to (usually) 1867. On paper, these rules didn't discriminate, but in practice, everybody understood how they would work: It was white people, by and large, who were "grandfathered in" to vote. "Because of the 15th Amendment, you can't pass laws saying blacks can't vote, which is what they wanted to do," Eric Foner, a Columbia University historian, told NPR in 2013. "But the 15th Amendment allowed restrictions that were non-racial. This was pretty prima facie a way to allow whites to vote, and not blacks."
3. "Gyp," "Gypped,"	When we feel shortchanged, cheated or swindled, we might say we're been "gypped" out of something. This one is racist because it's tied to the term "gypsy," an offensive term used to refer to the Romani people, who've long faced discrimination because of their darker skin and were even enslaved in some parts of Europe.

“Jip” and “Jipped”	Sweeping laws against the Romani people were widespread in many European countries. For instance, in Britain, a 1530 law banned Romani people from entering the country and forced those already living there to leave within 16 days. “Fifteen years later, a meeting of the Holy Roman Empire declared ‘whoever kills a gypsy, will be guilty of no murder,’ leading to a killing spree so severe the empire was forced to issue a caveat that citizens were not allowed to drown women and children,” Kitty Wenham-Ross wrote in Foreign Policy.
4. “Uppity”	If a Black school superintendent says something critical about a certain department’s performance, a white teacher might call the superintendent “uppity” behind her back. President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama were repeatedly called “uppity” during his administration. These days, those who use the term to describe Black people will usually claim ignorance of its racial overtones and say they simply meant haughty or elitist, as then-Georgia Rep. Lynn Westmoreland did when he used the word to describe the Obamas in 2008. But the term is more historically loaded than any of its synonyms, said Thandiwe Dee Watts-Jones, a psychologist and social justice advocate who writes about race. “It’s used to disparage a Black person who does not know his or her place,” she said. “‘Uppity’ is a term used by White people to refer to Black people who have the audacity to think well of themselves, to assert unapologetically an opinion that may be outside a white person’s comfort zone or thinking.”
5. “Articulate”	There are words that don’t necessarily have etymologies that are racist, but they’re used in a racist manner, nonetheless. “Articulate” is one of them, said Megan Figueroa, a linguist and co-host of The Vocal Fries podcast about linguistic discrimination. Consider “articulate” the slightly less racist, but still cut-from-the-same-cloth cousin of “uppity.” To call a Black person articulate or “well-spoken” is to suggest that you expect the opposite to be true. “When a non-Black person says to a Black person, ‘You are so articulate!’ what you are saying is that you are surprised they have a certain set of ‘acceptable’ linguistic skills, and here, ‘acceptable’ equates to ‘sounds white,’” Figueroa said. “This upholds the racist idea that the only way for Black people to be taken seriously is to sound white, when linguistically speaking, both ways of speaking are equally good.”
6. “Spirit Animal”	These days, “spirit animal” is almost a term of endearment, a phrase used colloquially to describe any person or thing the speaker deeply relates to or loves. “Plankton from ‘SpongeBob’ is my spirit animal.” “Rihanna is my spirit animal.” For many Indigenous people, though, the phrase refers to spirits who “help guide or protect a person on a journey and whose characteristics that person shares or embodies,” per Dictionary.com. Critics call casual usage of the term by non-Natives cultural appropriation. “There are terms like ‘spirit animal’ which denote something positive, intimate, universally attractive and don’t seem to denigrate the original owners of the term — but the acid test is not to make that judgment ourselves but to ask, in this case Native Americans, what they think,” Thorne said.

	“Nearly always they will say they don’t feel comfortable with the casual cultural appropriation,” he said. To return to Rihanna, the singer provided a great case study in how to learn from misusing a phrase like “spirit animal.” Last year on Instagram, she referred to her choreographer Parris Goebel as her “spirit animal.” A follower promptly called her out: “Please stop using ‘spirit animal’ unless you belong to one of the indigenous groups to which this concept belongs.” Rather than taking offense at being criticized, Rihanna owned up to her mistake and promised to do better. “You’re so right! It won’t happen again,” she said.
7. "Off the reservation"	Implies you are not thinking or functioning properly. “Hey, Bob, you’re going off the reservation on this deal.” Implies going off the reservation makes you stupid or crazy. It probably dates back to the USA experience where they really did try to forcibly keep Native Americans on reservations. In Canada, the term is "reserve" which is why we think this expression must have originated in the USA. *https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/culturally-offensive-phrases-you-should-use-at*
8. “Paddy Wagon”	“Paddy wagon” has been called the last surviving Irish American slur. Indeed, we might have forgotten about it had President Donald Trump not used it a few years back while disparaging another ethnic group: Mexicans. Speaking at a Republican rally in June 2018, Trump railed against undocumented immigrants and claimed that his administration was rounding up MS-13 gang members, putting them in “paddy wagons” to “get ’em the hell out of our country.” Irish journalist Dermot McEvoy criticized Trump for using the epithet and gave an overview of its history: The term “Paddy Wagon” goes back to the 19th century when Irish immigrants, refugees from the Great Famine, flooded the cities of the northeastern U.S. The rowdy hated Catholic Irish, as the poor frequently do, liked to steal, drink and fight. This behavior usually caused them to be arrested and carted away in Black Marias. Soon the Marias had a new name—Paddy Wagons! The history of pejoratives for the Irish is colorful—and racist. There were all kinds of epithets aimed at the Irish.
9. “Long Time No See” and “No Can Do”	If it’s been a minute since you’ve seen a friend, you might say, “Long time no see.” If your mom asks you to get a list of chores done by the end of the day and it’s already 6 p.m., you might playfully answer, “Ha, no can do.” The history of the phrases isn’t innocent, though. “No can do” originally emerged in the 19th century to mocked Chinese immigrants’ speech patterns in English. (“Pidgin English,” as it was called.) As for “long time no see,” it’s debated whether the phrase originally mimicked and denigrated Chinese or Native American speech patterns.