

# Celebrating Black History through Education and Awareness

*“Some day we’ll be able to measure the power of words. I think they are things. They get on the walls. They get in your wallpaper. They get in your rugs, in your upholstery, and your clothes, and finally in to you.”*

-Maya Angelou

## Words Matter. Choose Thoughtfully.

Scan the QR code to access our “Words Matter: A Guide to Inclusive Language around Racial and Ethnic Identity”



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## *What is Discursive Racism?*

The form of racism that uses words rooted in stereotypical meaning and typically includes racially tinged forms of everyday communication that sustain racism. While some words may appear innocuous, they may be linked to harmful histories and can negatively impact a person's psychological well-being. Part of the reason that discursive racism appears innocuous or racially neutral is that much of it is not overt or easily identifiable like racial epithets or slurs. While a word may not be personally offensive to you, it may be taken that way by others because of the word's connotations or histories.



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## Tip #1: Learn the history behind certain words or phrases

Certain words and phrases have origins that are racially biased or anti-ethnic, or have connections to racist or anti-ethnic events or actions. They may contain hidden messages based on outdated social norms and/or historical oppression.

### Brown Bag

**Current Use:** Informal learning opportunities at work

**Historic Use:** In the early 20th century the 'paper bag test' was used as a form of discrimination to deny dark-skinned Black Americans access to certain clubs, organizations, and even churches. The test is the continued legacy of colorism.

**Suggested Alternative:** Lunch and Learn or Chat and Chew



### Cake Walk

**Current Use:** An absurdly or surprisingly easy task.

**Historic Use:** Refers to an elaborately decorated cake enslaved persons would be awarded after winning a dance competition. The dance was a subtle way enslaved persons mocked their enslavers, who eventually began performing them in minstrel shows (a type of variety show where white performers performed in black face).



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## Tip #2: Be mindful of microaggressions

Chester Pierce coined the term racial microaggressions in the 1970s to describe the subtle ways Black people experience discrimination. There are three types: microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults.

### Microinsults

Is the most subtle of the three and conveys rudeness, insensitivity, and demeans a person's racial or ethnic identity  
E.g. "You speak so eloquently"; Using the terms "ghetto" or "thug" to describe a Black man; Saying "Black people are so loud"; Saying "you people"

### Microinvalidations

Are characterized by words or phrases that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.

E.g. Telling a Black person "I don't see color" when they are talking about their experiences with racism or saying "I'm not racist, I have a Black (insert friend, family member, coworker, etc.)"

### Microassaults

Are the conscious and intentional actions or slurs that are often compared to the traditional concept of racism

E.g., racist jokes, slurs, or epithets; displaying a swastika or other racist symbols; discouraging or making comments about interracial couples or families.



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## Tip #3: Be mindful of self-identification

People have a right to choose how to identify themselves and those terms may not always be deemed acceptable by other members of the same ethnic or racial group. When in doubt, simply ask.

### Should You Use Black or African American?

**Black** is a term that may be used as a sense of pride and empowerment; may also be used because of the unique Black experience in America, regardless of national origin.

**African American** refers to both descendants of enslaved persons in the US AND African immigrants and their children.

While neither is considered offensive, they are not always interchangeable.

### Important things to note:

- The "B" in Black is always capitalized
- People of African descent may not identify as Black or African American (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, West Indian, Afro-Latino/a, etc.)
- Some alternatives can include American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) or Descendants of American Slaves (DAS)



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