Is This Racist?

How Editors Can Identify Hidden Bias in Language

#IsThisRacist #ACES2017
Introduction

Catching racist and discriminatory language requires more than an awareness of slurs and pejorative terminology.

Racism on paper can take many subtle forms, including:

- the lack of fair and equal media representation
- prejudicial narratives
- racializing words through juxtaposition
- the unintentional othering of people of color

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Our Speakers

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Inclusivity, language & ‘guides’

Steve Bien-Aimé, Ph.D.
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Inclusive vs. politically correct

- Politically correct
  - Doing something because “you don’t want to get in trouble”

- Inclusive
  - Creating an environment where everyone feels welcome

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If it’s not like ‘me’ ...

- Who is exotic

  ![Exotic definition](image)

  **Simple Definition of Exotic**

  very different, strange, or unusual

  of a plant or animal: not living or growing naturally in a particular area: from another part of the world

  Source: Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary

- “Asian” food

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Everything is intentional

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Illegal vs. immigrant

- Didn’t influence opinions on immigration policies
  - Merolla, Ramakrishnan & Haynes, 2013

- Amnesty vs. pathway to legalization did influence

- Consider the readers/listeners/viewers
  - What language are you telling them to use?
    - Fostering or hindering civic debate?

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Who are in communities?

- “Black community”
  - White community?

- “Muslim community”
  - Christian community?

- “Women’s issues”
  - Men’s issues?

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Treat everyone equally

- How could naming race affect communities at large?

- Aurora shooting vs. Virginia Tech
  - Journalists’ viewpoints

- Per AP Stylebook: “The racial reference should be removed when the individual is apprehended or found.”

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Guides, not gods

- Stylebooks do not replace good judgment
- Consider Chelsea Manning situation
For the time being, AP stories will use gender-neutral references to Manning and provide the pertinent background on the transgender issue. However, when reporting is completed, the AP Stylebook entry on “transgender” will be AP’s guide.

That stylebook entry states: “Use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly.”

The AP
The Associated Press will henceforth use Pvt. Chelsea E. Manning and female pronouns for the soldier formerly known as Bradley Manning, in accordance with her wishes to live as a woman.

At this time, the AP is seeking more details about the gender change statement attributed to Pfc. Bradley Manning that was read Thursday on the “Today” show in the presence of defense attorney David Coombs. The typewritten statement said “I am Chelsea Manning. I am a female,” and asked supporters to use “my new name and use
Purpose of linguistic guides

● 2 categories
  ○ Descriptive
    ■ Reflect common standards
    ■ Journalistically objective
  ○ Prescriptive
    ○ Set common standards
    ○ Reshape the debate
Derogatory terms

“Do not use derogatory terms such as krauts (for Germans) or n***** (for Negroes) except in direct quotes, and then only when their use is an integral, essential part of the story” (Angione, 1977, p. 67).

- From 1977-2007
- Slurs removed by 2014

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AP Stylebook cont.

- Stylebook is descriptive
  - “… outlines basic rules on grammar, punctuation, usage and journalistic style, but it also reflects changes in common language” (Pruitt, 2014)
Language sets the terrain

• “potential set of possibilities”
  ○ Fairclough, 2003, p. 23

• “The relationship between language and society is not purely unidirectional. Changes in language could help signal/spur shifts in society, and changes in society can create changes in language.”
  ○ Bien-Aimé, 2016, p. 20
Beyond Terminology

Zooming Out to Focus on Bias

Karen Yin
@consciousstyles

consciousstyleguide.com
Unconscious Biases . . .

- are unconscious.
- can be activated outside of our control and without our consent.
- don’t necessarily align with our declared beliefs.
- can be held against the groups we belong to.
- infiltrate everything.

Source: Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Avoiding bias isn’t incidental to an editor’s job but central.
Detecting Hidden Bias: Zoom Levels

1. Word Level: Parity
2. Sentence Level: Portrayal
3. Story Level: Framing
4. Series Level: Representation
Parity: How We Treat People in Parallel Contexts
Example of Unconscious Bias

Reducing an individual to a detail or stereotype

Original headline

Olympics: Michael Phelps shares historic night with African-American

Revised headline

Olympics: Stanford’s Simone Manuel and Michael Phelps make history

Source: San Jose Mercury News, August 11, 2016
Example of Unconscious Bias

Reducing an individual to a detail or stereotype

Did you think she was the wife . . . or the nanny?

Robert E. Kelly, Jung-a Kim, and their child Marion | Source: BBC News, March 10, 2017
Othering thrives on

the exaggeration of differences and

the encouragement of indifference to one another’s humanity.
Expectation of assimilation or adaptation

“Stripped of its accent mark, Bartolo Colón’s surname is not Spanish for Columbus; it becomes the name of a part of the large intestine. Stripped of its tilde, pena, which means rock, becomes pena, which is Spanish for pity or pain.”

—Jonathan Blitzer, “Baseball Campaign Puts the Accent on Spanish Names”
(The New York Times, August 6, 2016)
Example of Unconscious Bias

Interchanging people of color

Rolling Stone mixed up the only two Asian American characters on Orange Is the New Black, played by Kimiko Glenn and Lori Tan Chinn.
Portrayal: How We Present and Describe People
“A critic’s condemnation of an author’s cartoonish or fetishized portrayal of a specific ethnic group is no more an infringement upon the author’s right to write than a critic’s disapproval of a book’s flimsy plot, plodding pace or cliché prose.”

—Anjali Enjeti, “White Authors Are Still Writing Racist Books Because White Critics Won’t Call Them Out” (Quartz, November 15, 2016)
Framing: How We Assign Interpretations and Conclusions

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Example of Unconscious Bias

Criminalizing people of color

Three University of Iowa wrestlers arrested, suspended

Burglary charges pending for several burglaries in Marion area

Lee Hamlin, The Gazette

MARCH 24, 2015 6:16 AM

MARION — Burglary charges are pending against three University of Iowa wrestlers arrested on alcohol-related charges last week.

Marion Police Lt. Scott Elman said officers were called out to Hunters Ridge around 1 a.m. Wednesday for a theft in progress call. Officers were given the description of a suspect vehicle, which matched a vehicle seen in the area.

Police said the vehicle was driven by Alonso Odell of Marion, and the下周

Four arrested in Coralville burglary investigation

One person punched, another knocked to floor in break-in

Lee Hamlin, The Gazette

MARCH 23, 2015 10:52 AM

CORALVILLE — Four men have been arrested in connection with a burglary investigation.

According to Coralville police criminal complaints, shortly before 4 a.m. on March 20, five suspects broke into a residence on Boston Way. Police said the suspects were looking for a gun. The burglars stole a TV, approximately $240 cash and a cellphone, police said.

Source: The (Iowa) Gazette, March 30, 2015
H/T: Boing Boing

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Representation: How We Balance Population, Proportion, and Perception

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Example of Unconscious Bias

Crediting the dominant culture within a group and ignoring intersections

Fact:
The 19th Amendment didn’t grant American women the right to vote in 1920.

Fact:
The Stonewall Riot of ’69 wasn’t led by a gay White man.

Fact:
Asian American includes more than three ethnicities.

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Racial Stereotypes, Clichés, and Tropes

- Learn what they are.
  The opposite of ignorance is knowledge. We can’t avoid racial stereotypes if we can’t identify them.

- Recognize them as bad writing at best.
  Racial clichés insult both subject and audience.

- Don’t shy from using them for good.
  Ultimately, stereotypes, clichés, and tropes are just devices, ones we can use to great effect. Deflate stereotypes by complicating them. Break a cliché in half. Turn a trope on its head. It isn’t hard to teach by poking fun at racism.

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So, *Is This Racist?* Do the Work.

Writing with Color
@writingwcolor, writingwithcolor.tumblr.com

TV Tropes
@tvtropes, tvtropes.org

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Final Thoughts

Write to people of color, not just about people of color. It’s about respect.

Cast different people. Change the script. Bad writing can harm.

Once in a while, see yourself as the villain. Nothing changes if we all think we’re the good guy.

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Verbal Redlining and Otherness

Rick Kenney, PhD
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Where we’re coming from

Locales and “verbal redlining”

“Redlining”:

- discrimination based on racial and economic mapping of cities and neighborhoods

http://powerreporting.com/color/

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Rick Kenney, PhD @richardjkenney
Where we’re coming from

Examples
St. Petersburg:
“South St. Pete”
Orlando:
“Parramore”
Pittsburgh
“Hill District”

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Parramore is a neighborhood in west-central Orlando, Florida. It is a historical neighborhood for Orlando residents of African descent, and suffered greatly during the Jim Crow era of institutionalized racism. In 2015, the unemployment rate was reported as 23.8% and median household income was $15,493.

The area was developed as a segregated African-American community. It was built in the 1880s by Orlando’s fourteenth mayor, James B. Parramore, as a development "to house the blacks employed in the households of white Orlandoans."

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Where we’re coming from

1996: Race riots in south St. Pete

Decision in St. Petersburg Riot Case Sparks New Clashes

Violence: Two officers are wounded after grand jury clears white policeman in killing of black motorist. His death ignited first conflict.

November 14, 1996 | From Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Hours after a white policeman was cleared in a shooting that sparked a race riot last month, angry mobs returned to the same streets Wednesday, wounding two officers and attacking passersby.

One of the officers was shot in the leg, and a sheriff’s helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing after a bullet pierced the windshield and grazed the co-pilot’s arm. At least seven other people were injured.

Angry groups of youths pelted passing cars with rocks and chunks of concrete and set trash bins and piles of debris ablaze in predominantly black south St. Petersburg. Police responded with volleys of tear gas.


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Where we’re coming from

2014: Midtown
16th Street and 18th Avenue South, in the Midtown neighborhood of St. Pete, where TyRon Lewis was killed.


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Incendiary Language

Mysteries of the Orient: Exoticizing and “Othering”

- ESPN: “Chink in the Armor”

- The Washington Post: “Hall of Famer Yao Ming Redefined ‘Chinaman’ for the NBA and Brought the Game to Hundreds of Millions”

- Japanese players commodified as “imports”

- Chef’s Table: Evan Kleiman says, “Everything there is subservient to focus on the food” about chef Niki Nakayama

- San Antonio Express News: “Inspectors Find Dogs in San Antonio Chinese Restaurant”
Incendiary Language

Metaphors of the primitive, the animalistic, and the criminal

- ESPN interview with Phil Jackson, “posse” for accomplished Black people:
  

- Nicki Minaj called “savage”:
  

- Comparing Venus Williams to a gorilla:
  

- Fox News anchor calls Lady Gaga’s Oscars performance “jigaboo music”
  
  http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=kristi-capel%2c+an+anchor+for+cleveland%27s+fox+8&view=detail&mid=06EFDEAA5D3B29046BC206EFDEAA5D3B29046BC2&rvsmid=9CCA21995C910CF250499CA21995C910CF250499&fsscr=0&FORM=VDFSRV

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Having the Conversation
Lessons From One Newsroom

Henry Fuhrmann
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Controller’s unlikely turn in spotlight

Chiang, described as ‘a numbers guy,’ makes waves with decision to dock lawmakers’ pay.

Shane Goldmacher
And Evan Halper
Reporting from Sacramento

As a high school kid in Illinois, John Chiang ran for student council on a populist platform: ridding the lunchroom jukebox of disco music.

“That was the major wedge issue,” recalled a friend who was his campaign partner. Disco was fading. Punk and new wave were coming in. They won.

Chiang, now the Golden State’s controller, became vice president of the student body — a notable achievement for one of the school’s few Asian kids and the target of name-calling and racial slurs. The friend was Dave Jones, who today is California’s insurance commissioner.

This week, the normally laid-back Chiang took an unpopular stand: In his capacity as controller, he made headlines by deciding to dock state lawmakers’ pay. Their budget math “simply did not add up,” he said, and he hit them with voter-approved sanctions for late spending plans.

However much it angered legislators, the move delighted the public. Chiang, a 48-year-old Democrat, has been in politics for more than two decades, but there is still a “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” quality about him. He stumbles over a sound bite, and his role is decidedly unsexy: processing payments and monitoring government cash flow.

This front-page news feature, a profile of up-and-coming California politician John Chiang, illustrates a process that generally worked well....

He was born in New York, and several years later, the family moved to the South Side of Chicago — among the first Asian American families in the neighborhood, Chiang said. Rocks occasionally burst through their windows.

"I remember the ugly racial epithets spray-painted on our garage."

Chiang recounts an incident from his youth. The first part of the quote seems sufficient. But do you, as a reader, as an editor, want to know the specific slurs used?

What if we told you that Chiang himself used the words? Would that justify their use? Are you more comfortable including them?

Because Chiang spoke the words (in fact, publicly, in a speech) to illustrate a point, not to inflict hate speech, the Times decided to use the full quote.
A road still divided

Senior editors, after much debate, decided to allow a spelled-out N-word, as spoken by a white town elder, in an article on the 50th-anniversary observance of the march in Selma. Many in the newsroom complained that the usage was gratuitous, notably black staffers who asked why they hadn’t been consulted.

Method thespian

In this feature, the writer chose to quote a lyric from the artist that used a slang version of the N-word. The problem: Every editor in the process incorrectly assumed that someone else had gotten the usage approved.

The Times received scores of complaints, and ended up running an apology, after publishing these letters, in which the writers defended the decision by the U.S. to incarcerate 120,000 residents of Japanese descent during World War II. The letter writers, complainants said, were guilty of expressing cultural and racial stereotypes and long-discounted historical inaccuracies about Japanese Americans. (From one of the letters: "Virtually everyone in the U.S. was assigned jobs to help the war effort. The Japanese were assigned the job of staying out of the way and not causing complications.")

Here, the process again broke down. The copy desk, rushing on deadline, had qualms about the material but trusted the highly respected section editor on her call to publish the letters. A wider discussion with other editors might have helped.
Checklists

Big picture

- Who is my audience?
- Who is my client or organization?
- Whom am I serving?
- Will the subject matter touch on race?
- Do they/we have formal guidelines?
- What are my standards?

Editing concerns

- Who said it?
- And where?
- How is the term being used?
- Is the term essential?

Next steps

- Whom do I consult?
- Who can make the call?
- Where else can I get help?

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Resources

Journalism Organizations & Community Guides

- Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) | Covering Asian America: http://www.aaja.org/coverageguide/
- National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)
- South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA)
- Strategic Alliance of Broadcasters for Aboriginal Reflection (SABAR) | Covering Aboriginal People: http://www.sabar.ca/key-terms/
- Unity: Journalists for Diversity

Other Tools

- “How to Query a Racist Comment” | Copyediting: http://www.copyediting.com/how-to-query-a-racist-comment/
- Racial Equity Tools | Glossary

For more, visit consciousstyleguide.com

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