



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on August 26, 2009

## Policing the English Language

“Quangos,” which means “quasi autonomous non-governmental organizations,” have enacted word-banning speech codes on the spectre’d isle that are so comical that they can hardly be believed.

Among the words on the blacklist, [the Times of London reports](#), are “black day” and most likely other terms beginning with black because it gives the term black a negative connotation, which might offend, well, blacks. This, of course, raises the question of whether blacks even want to be called black given this state of emergency, but save that one for another day.



“Black day,” according to the [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission](#), must be replaced with “miserable day.” No one, you see, wants to create a “hierarchical valuation of skin colour,” and the quango “even urges employees to be mindful of the term ‘ethnic minority’ because it can imply ‘something smaller and less important’.” As [the Belfast Telegraph reported](#), “Staff have been advised that certain phrases could carry a hierarchical value. The general advice is consider sensibly how language might be perceived by people and think about how certain phrases could cause offence.”

The *Times* [also reports](#) on the [South West Regional Development Agency](#). Says the SWRDA, “Terms such as ‘[black sheep of the family](#)’, ‘black looks’ and ‘black mark’ have no direct link to skin colour but potentially serve to reinforce a negative view of all things black. Equally, certain terms imply a negative image of ‘black’ by reinforcing the positive aspects of white. For example, in the context of being above suspicion, the phrase ‘whiter than white’ is often used. Purer than pure or cleaner than clean are alternatives which do not infer that anything other than white should be regarded with suspicion.”

It doesn’t stop there. London’s [National Gallery](#) has banned “gentleman’s agreement,” and not because of [the novel](#) and [Gregory Peck movie](#) of the same name, which explores anti-Semitism. It’s the “gentleman” that won’t do. So a gentleman’s agreement is now an agreement “based on trust.” Nor will the gallery ever have another “right hand man.” With all due respect to fiddle activists, second fiddles will become the “second in command.”

Until recently, something called the [Learning and Skills Council](#), which “exists to make England better skilled and more competitive,” was suffering an even more inconspicuous chink in its linguistic armor. But now a task must be “perfected” and not “mastered,” undoubtedly to protect the feelings of slaves, while a university has banned the term “master bedroom.” That perfected and mastered are different words didn’t seem to occur to the learned and skilled wordsmiths at the Learning and Skills Council.

This campaign rather echoes what’s been going on everywhere with speech codes and new translations of the Bible that not only do not refer to God as father but also identify Him as a her. In 1999, a city employee in Washington, D.C., [resigned under pressure](#) after using the term “niggardly” at work. Black coworkers didn’t understand the word. He calmly accepted the verdict, and when the mayor offered to let him return to the same job, he refused. In Wilmington, N.C., in 2002, [a black parent complained](#)



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about her daughter's learning the word in fourth grade, so the principal subsequently banned the word from the classroom and counselors counseled the students. Teaching the students a new word, a deputy school superintendent said, was "an inappropriate action."

The question is where this leaves the English language. Someone will always be displeased with one word or another. That means mankind doesn't have a [Chinaman's chance](#) of scrubbing English until it is [spic and span](#).



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