



BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

1962

Nigger Lake

MORE THAN A NAME

HOW WORDS SHAPE LEGACY & POWER

HOW DO WE FIND MEANING IN NAMES? In biblical times, the Greeks often used the word “onoma” (ὄνομα) in place of the word “name.” To them, this word encompassed one’s reputation, especially for those in a position of power. Their identity became directly linked to their relationship with others (i.e. “The Father). The opposite held true in other cultures like the Iroquois where Chiefs in the 1600s could have as many as six names attached to them as a symbol of great honor. In modern western society, names serve as an arbitrary identifier attached to a person. What other ways do we label people and **what impact do those words have?**

Names can uplift, empower and preserve history, but they have also been used as tools of oppression and dehumanization.

THE IMPACT OF A NAME



NAMES ARE OFTEN MEANT TO HONOR THE PAST BUT CAN INADVERTENTLY CAUSE HARM

This conversation has reinvented itself throughout U.S. History. Not long after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the town board of what is modern-day Nowthen voted to rename the lake. This action reflected a national effort to eliminate discriminatory language in society. In 2015, a racially motivated church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, sparked civil unrest, which authors Ethan Kytle and Blain Roberts claim led people to take a closer look at where else racism lingers. Several communities pressured city officials to remove statues and rename Universities that honored members of the Confederate army.

Some histories are not lost but deliberately concealed. If mounted under intentional ambiguity, it seems that some names carry secrets we may never fully uncover - exactly as intended.



Residents called Burns Lake in Nowthen N***er Lake for many years as a reference to the Black people who made there home on its shores. Evidence shows James Shepherd, a veteran of the United States Colored Troops in the Civil War, lived there with his wife, Mary and their eight children.

BURNS LAKE WAS NAMED WHAT?



reddit



r/minnesota

CONVERSATIONS CONTINUE ON AND OFFLINE

Bradinator started a conversation about Burns Lake's previous name on the Minnesota subreddit

ANONYMOUS LOCAL

I grew up Nouthen/St Francis so it was a known thing. It was mostly “do you know what they called that lake?” “Black person lake” or worse...It was literally just because a black person was living on the lake. I do not know the person or if they are still there but that was the rumor.

ALBATROSSONTIME

And it's worth noting that Burns Lake was the town's “second” choice. They originally wanted to rename it to Niger Lake.

MRNOTSOGOODTIME

Ah yes, Remove a “g” and that clarifies all 🙄

LEZOONS

Because people's sense of right/wrong change over time...

CHIRON_CAT

...Different times really were different times. That doesn't mean the racism wasn't real and awful. Its unfair to expect someone 150 years ago to think of the N word as a horrible cuss word like it is today, because back then it WASN'T a cuss word.

LASTING POWER OF WORDS

Language shapes memory, power, and identity. Understanding the history behind words and names forces us to ask:

- What stories do the words we use carry with them?
- How do names and labels shape the way we see people and places?
- When should language evolve to reflect justice and dignity?

The power of naming defines the power of history.

How we use words—and how we change them—reveals what we choose to remember and honor.

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