

What's Does "Savage" Mean?

Before the colonial era, the word "savage" meant something a little different than it does today. The term just used to mean the natural world ("savage nature"), and anything that wasn't a part of "civilization." One of the main goals of colonialism was to bring civilization to all the people in the world who hadn't started building highways and factories yet. Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" perfectly captures what many Europeans thought was their duty to share the advances of their civilization with the rest of the world. However, not all peoples were agreeable to this idea, and chose to live in a way they believed was more in line with the natural world. Since the word "savage" described the uncontrollable aspect of nature, people like this—Africans, Native Americans—were called "savages." Over time, though, the term "savage" became equated with how harshly those people fought to reject European civilization. During the course of the 1700s and 1800s, the term "savage" began to get a negative connotation, and was used to describe "uncivilized" peoples who fought against any attempt to civilize them. Soon, the term "savage" came to mean "violently aggressively wild." Whenever any Indian victory or slave revolt was successful, the media quickly portrayed the perpetrators as "savages." Still today, the term is a racial code word used to refer to the idea that people of color cannot control their inner passions. Whenever we hear that term used, we should take a look at the agenda of whoever's using it.

This is how race is constructed. Remember, racism is not simply classifying people based on physical characteristics, it is then making the conclusion that RACIAL GROUPS SHARE BEHAVIORS **BECAUSE OF THOSE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS**. It is the linking of the physical with the behavioral. It is the belief of some people that any Native American or black they meet would be more likely to be violent and aggressive than a person of another race. These linkages of behavior with race still linger with us today, but they are, like they were then, completely without scientific merit. At one point in American history, it was seen as common knowledge that both Irish people and poor people were naturally lazy.

But the spread of this theory linking race to behavior is what allowed for laws to be passed back then banning interracial unions and restricting blacks from owning guns. And it was these same laws that perpetuated the spread of white supremacist thinking among America's poor. In Europe, the poor had been looked down upon as much as foreign races. But in America, laws like this convinced poor Americans who now identified as "white" of their racial superiority. So, even though American poor whites spent 95% of their lives working and living alongside other poor blacks and Indians, politicians could easily manipulate them into rioting against their neighbors—instead of them—whenever there was a grievance about military duty or lack of jobs. This is how the American political machine solved the problem of populist revolts—by dividing the people up and getting them to fight each other. And ever since, ultra-rich Americans have been convincing poor people to fight and call each other nasty names like "liberal" and "conservative" even though we have much more in common with each other than we do with them.