

Aligning Document Names for Inclusion

REPLACING THE RACIALIZED TERM "WHITE PAPER"



WHAT IS A

"WHITE PAPER"

THE TERM "WHITE PAPER" OR "WHITEPAPER" IS USED BY A WIDE RANGE OF PROFESSIONALS TO DESCRIBE A DOCUMENT MEANT TO EDUCATE AND AID DECISION MAKING.

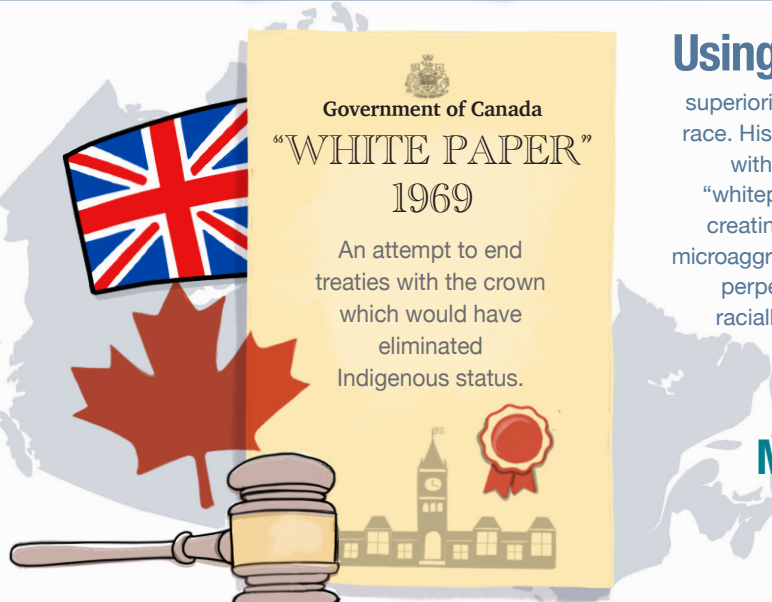


Why Renaming is Imperative

The term "white paper" or "whitepaper" is racialized and creates a barrier to reconciliation. Using "white" as synonymous with authority is a microaggression and a form of racism that can add to the hostile environments Indigenous and racialized people experience in government, education and healthcare. Changing the term would contribute to more inclusive language.

History

The term originated in the British Government where documents were colour coded based on the intended audience. A white cover page was used to indicate a document for the public, and were referred to as "white papers". This practice migrated to Canada where they are currently used in business, government, academia, and technical fields.



Using "WHITE" connotes power and often implies superiority of peoples or individuals based on race. Historically "white" has been associated with "good" which in-part gives the term, "whitepaper", its power. It is the opposite of creating inclusive language and is a form of microaggression. The continued use of the term perpetuates colonial perspectives that are racially insensitive. Terms such as whitelist and blacklist have been replaced.

What is a MICROAGGRESSION?

Racisms can be subtle, as opposed to outright and explicit prejudices. Subtle, historical and commonplace terms can be forms of microaggressions.

Microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults.

Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities"

– (Sue et al., 2007).

The continued use of the term perpetuates racial and colonial perspectives that are racially insensitive.

The response was the Red Paper with the intent to establish Indigenous self-government and to reiterate the spirit and heart of the treaties, and the Dominion Act.

Supporting Inclusive Languages

To acknowledge the need for non-racialized inclusive language and support the process of reconciliation, we propose ending the use of the term "white paper". Through consultation, we suggest naming documents with inclusive language that aligns with the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and supports the Truth and Reconciliation Calls for Action (TRC) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada et al., 2015) to create culturally appropriate material and intercultural understanding; as well as training in intercultural competency and anti-racism in law, business, journalism, healthcare, and education (TRC, 2015).



States shall take effective measures, in consultation and cooperation with the Indigenous peoples concerned, to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and to promote tolerance, understanding and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of society.

United Nations, 2007 article 15.2



Library
Science

Business

Academia

Government

NAMING PRACTICES NEED TO BE INCLUSIVE FOR ALL



Free from
racism



Reflect the nature
of the information



Reflect the source
of the information



Ensure cultural
appropriateness



Ensure
inclusivity



Ease of use through
descriptive titles

What is the impact of change?

Some library databases which collect journal articles use a controlled vocabulary usually from the Library of Congress (LC) subject headings. There is no subject heading term that describes a “white paper”. Removing the term will have no effect on how the documents are classified. When searching grey literature, the search strategy is to use controlled vocabulary terms and document types. For example, searching Google for research on medical trials for a specific drug, you would use “medical trials”, “name of drug” and “PDF” for the document type. This would return a list of resources related to the topic being searched.

What are the options for renaming & replacement?

Several suggestions have been made and no singular term encompasses the pervasive uses of “white paper”. Instead, it is recommended to use specific descriptions of documents such as policy paper, research report, concept brief, technical report, infographic, marketing strategy.

There is no agreement on a universal term to-date and replacements for the term “white paper” will likely come from different sectors.



Our request is for all individuals to consider the impact of racialized language and naming practices as a step toward reconciliation and awareness. As with all changes in language, alternatives will evolve, and the existence of one universal term is unlikely – at this time. We are asking for your consideration in applying conscientious creativity in developing new and respectful naming protocols. What is clear is that the term “white paper” should not be used.

Contributors: Dr. Jennifer Jakobi, Rebecca McCullough, Haizley Trevor-Smith, and Iryna Molodecky, with thanks to Debbie Chaves (Head of Copyright and Course Resources; Laurier Library), Ian Cull (UBCO Indigenous Advisor), and participants of “Renaming Whitepapers” focus groups. The full list of contributors is available at wwest-cwse.ca. Supported by the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering BC and Yukon Region.

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