

Update: Yes, A 'Redskin' Does, In Fact, Mean the Scalped Head of a Native American, Sold, Like a Pelt, for Cash

Many have claimed that our story about the etymology of "Redskin" was wrong. This document from 1863 proves otherwise.

BY [BAXTER HOLMES](#) PUBLISHED: JUN 18, 2014 7:58 AM EDT

2 MIN READ

Above is an excerpt from The Daily Republican newspaper in Winona, Minnesota from Sept. 24, 1863. It reads:

The State reward for dead Indians has been increased to \$200 for every red-skin sent to Purgatory. This sum is more than the dead bodies of all the Indians east of the Red River are worth.

Many challenge what the term "redskin" means to Native Americans. I heard from a lot of them yesterday about a piece detailing how the term has affected my life as a Native American. Some accused us of personally [forging and inventing the Phips Proclamation](#), a [historical document from 1755](#) that called for the scalping of Indians. Others accused us of [making up the etymology of the word](#). Others implied it doesn't matter because "[there's like 6 true Native Americans](#)" left anyway.

A few cited a [study written by Smithsonian Institution senior linguist Ives Goddard](#) that makes the case that the word did not begin as an insult.

But here is a quote from another member of the Smithsonian – Kevin Gover, a member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma and director of the Institution's National Museum of the American Indian:

What is germane to the conversation? What is semantics? That is debatable. The fact remains that to many Native Americans, the term "redskin" has long meant the act of our ancestor's scalps being collected for bounty.

The kind of bounty that was referenced above. The kind of bounty that was referenced in the 1755 Phips Proclamation.

In terms of etymology, words change and meanings evolve. *Fag*, for instance, was once the accepted spelling for a cigarette throughout most of Europe. Now it's a common gay slur. *Wetback*, a Latino editor told me yesterday, was once a common term in headlines, but no longer.

All throughout yesterday, I received a deluge of feedback to my piece for *Esquire*. Here is one note. It is from a Native American.

Those redskins were ripped from native heads, ripping apart families, tribes, the very essence of our tribal cultures.

Redskins. Grotesque in every sense of the word.