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CHANGING RACIAL LABELS: FROM “COLORED” TO “NEGRO” TO “BLACK” TO “AFRICAN AMERICAN”

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Abstract

Labels play an important role in defining groups and individuals who belong to the groups. This has been especially true for racial and ethnic groups in general and for Blacks in particular. Over the past century the standard term for Blacks has shifted from “Colored” to “Negro” to “Black” and now perhaps to “African American.” The changes can be seen as attempts by Blacks to redefine themselves and to gain respect and standing in a society that has held them to be subordinate and inferior.

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