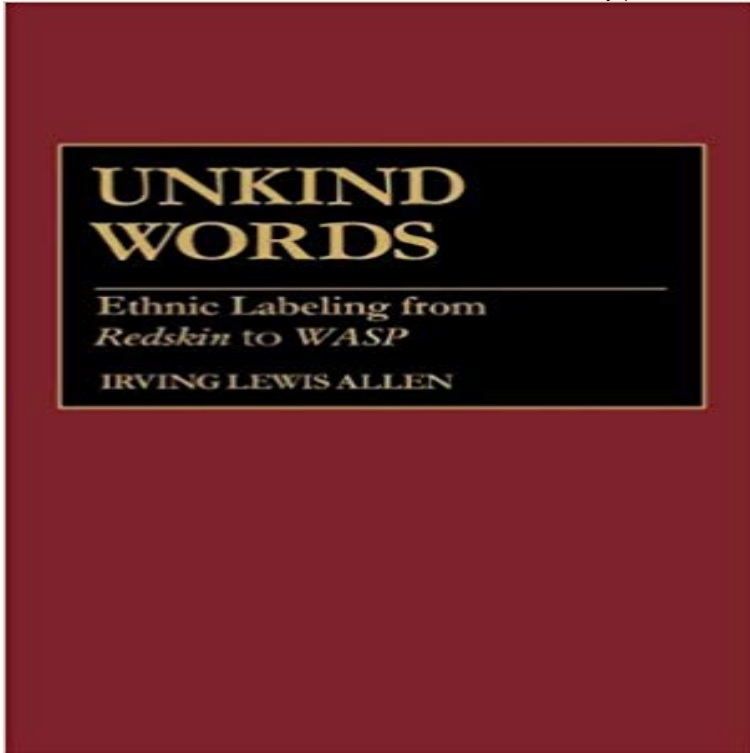


## Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to WASP



In this extensive study of ethnic labeling in the United States popular speech and usage, Irving Lewis Allen explores the major traditional themes behind the making of ethnic slurs. Viewing U.S. slang as a reflection of social diversity, rapid change, and the complexity of U.S. society, Allen puts forth a special insight into the social workings of American culture, both past and present. The book offers an overview of the major traditional themes used in the development of ethnic slurs as well as the most recent fads of covert and devious slurring with codewords and various kinds of sly word games. Unkind Words delivers its message with unusual clarity, that too often shoddy language shapes our thinking about the politics of ethnicity. Divided into two parts, the book begins with a detailed study of the older and more traditional slurs in American vernacular. These words the author terms fighting words, which, when dropped, often raised fists in schoolyards and barrooms. The book uncovers the origins of these slurs--few are heard in today's public discourse--and places them in a word museum where the reader can view the foolish viciousness of a cultural past. In one chapter, the author singles out the derogatory labels that have been applied specifically to women and reveals slurs that originate in both gender and ethnic conflict. The second part of the book focuses on labels that have appeared in the last few decades, often more genteel and less confrontational. While more subtle than their forerunners, these words often serve the same old psychological and social needs to stereotype and express hostility. Anyone interested in ethnic identity in the United States, in the workings of a plural society, or the origins and uses of American ethnic slurs, will find Unkind Words fascinating reading.

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