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MODERN ALLUSIONS

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Beatrice Probably Beatrice Portinari (1266–1290) of Florence, Italy, whom the poet DANTE first met when he was nine years old and again when he was eighteen. She died in 1290 when Dante was only 25. She had married Simone de' Bardi, and Dante in 1303 married Gemma Donati, who remained in Florence when Dante was exiled for in 1302. The love of Dante for Beatrice was an ideal, spiritual love. She was his muse

SYLVIA COLE
& ABRAHAM H. LASS

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The Facts On File Dictionary of Modern Allusions

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Introduction

Some years ago, an anecdote in the *New York Times* described a pickup basketball game in a local park. One player, to the embarrassment of his teammates, made wild passes at the basket whenever the ball came to him:

His fifth shot, awkwardly launched, hit the backboard and went in! A cynical cheer rose up and from its midst a voice boomed, "It's a Scud!" Everyone understood. I felt I was witnessing the birth of a new word in our living language.

(Richard Povill, "Metropolitan Diary," *New York Times*, January 30, 1991)

In fact, the writer of this anecdote was witnessing not so much the birth of a new word as the birth of a new allusion. After all, "Scud" had been for several decades a military code word for a Soviet-made missile. What had not been known about the Scud before its use in the Gulf War was its erratic performance: it turned out to be not a precision instrument but instead a hit-or-miss projectile that did not always find its target. In the anecdote, the ball had acted like a Scud; therefore, metaphorically, it *was* a Scud. In this context, "Scud" is an allusion summing up in one word the similar attributes of both the missile and the basketball shot.

Our language is chock full of allusions, which enable us to describe in a word what otherwise might take a paragraph or even several pages to explain. Consult a dictionary and you will find allusion defined as a casual reference, something alluded to. In that case, anything or anybody could be an allusion: the asparagus we had for lunch; Aunt Sophie's pet parakeet; a childhood memory of cleaning board erasers in the schoolyard—anything. As this book uses the term, an allusion is not a mere reference but a reference that has been transformed into a metaphor; a reference that stands for a certain set of attributes or circumstances. Thus, a brilliant student or, sarcastically, a very stupid one may be hailed as "an Einstein." A person of selfless devotion to the sick and the poor may be referred to as "another Mother Teresa." Comical linguistic blunders are malapropisms, from Mrs. Malaprop, a

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character who mangled the English language in Richard Sheridan's 18th-century play *The Rivals*. More currently, such blunders are often referred to as "Goldwynisms," after Sam Goldwyn, the Hollywood producer, or "Berraisms," after Yogi Berra, the baseball player. A highly touted product that turns out to be a dismal failure is "an Edsel," from the name of the Ford car that bombed. The word for a slick substance applied to cooking utensils to render them non-stick becomes an allusion in the appellation "the Teflon president," to describe Ronald Reagan.

Some allusions call up a more complex set of attributes and circumstances. In the sentence, "In our negotiations with Milosevic we must guard against another Munich," "Munich" is not merely a city in Germany; it is an allusion standing for appeasement. It refers to the 1938 Munich Pact, in which the prime minister of Britain, Neville Chamberlain, in the vain hope of achieving "peace in our time," allowed Adolf Hitler to annex the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia. How much more meaningful in this context is the allusion, with all its historical overtones of frightful consequences, than the word "appeasement"!

Similarly, we may come upon a scornful allusion to somebody as "a Walter Mitty." If we are familiar with James Thurber's short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," we conjure up a vision of a poor henpecked schnook who compensates for his insignificance by daydreaming endlessly of glamorous adventures in which he plays the conquering hero. If we do not know the origin of the allusion, however, its full meaning and import are lost on us.

One more example: We are all familiar with the blatant deception with which classrooms, summer camps, old-age homes, even certain concentration camps have been prettied up on the eve of inspections. Such false facades are known as "Potemkin villages," an allusion to the cardboard façade with which the 18th-century Russian prince Grigory Potemkin covered the miserable dwellings of an entire village through which Empress Catherine II (Catherine the Great) would have to pass on her scheduled visit. The question arises: Why use the allusion rather than the bald and more accessible description of façade? Because the allusion, in a word, enriches and vitalizes the description with a reference to its colorful source.


The Facts On File Dictionary of Cultural and Historical Allusions explains allusions of the past millennium, roughly from 1000 to A.D. 2000. To compile the book, we revised and expanded *The Facts On File Dictionary of 20th-Century Allusions*, originally published in 1991, and combined it with more than 600 entirely new entries that cover allusions from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. (Allusions from the classical and biblical eras have already been collected in *The Facts On File Dictionary of Classical, Biblical and Literary Allusions*.) It has been a prodigious task but a rewarding one, yielding insights into the changes that have occurred in our civilization and in the language that mirrors it.

Culture before the middle of the 19th century was disseminated and handed down mostly through the written word by and for an educated, literate elite, an aristocracy of wealth or genius. Most of the allusions from that time refer to authors and the characters they created in poetry, novels and plays; to artists and their subjects; to intellectuals and their ideas; and to the leading figures and events in politics and war. To mention a few: "Rabelaisian" (ribald), "Lilliputian" (diminutive or petty), a Becky Sharp (opportunistic), "Hogarthian" (satirical), "Napoleonic" (grandiosely ambitious).

In our own time, language borrows more and more from mass culture: movies (Rambo), radio ("Who's on first?"), television (Ozzie and Harriet), cartoons (Charlie Brown), politics ("read my lips"), sports (full-court press) and commercial products (Marlboro Man), among other sources. In the alphabetical order in which these allusions are arranged, high and low culture mingle without prejudice: Michelangelo is followed by Mickey Mouse.

This book provides the source and original meaning of each allusion, as well as its meaning and use in our language today. Examples and cross-references are supplied where necessary. Of course, some allusions are so far-ranging in scope that they do not lend themselves to short, easy definitions, so the appropriate meaning to fit a particular use must be extrapolated from various possibilities. The word "Faulknerian," for example, calls up a complex pattern of Southern social castes, racial violence, religiosity, obsession with the antebellum past, morbid sexuality, alienation, hallucinatory and rhapsodic language, as well as ram-bunctious humor. In a similar way, the precise meaning of such allusions as "Chaucerian," "Shakespearean," "Dickensian" and "Kafkaesque" depends on the context; our definitions try to summarize the complex visions and strategies such allusions represent.

We hope this dictionary provides a useful and reader-friendly reference for becoming acquainted with those allusions of the distant and more recent past that have survived and become part of the contemporary culture.



Abbott and Costello Bud Abbott (the tall, debonair one) and Lou Costello (the short, explosive one) were the top money-making comedy team in movies of the 1940s, then became the most watched, most syndicated TV performers (1951–53). The critics hated them and the show itself. The audience loved them and the show itself.

Essentially, Abbott (1895–1974) and Costello (1906–59) were reusing material that they had been using on stage and in film since the 1930s. The Abbott and Costello show consisted largely (the critics maintained *exclusively*) of lowbrow slapstick; outrageous puns; knockabout, physical, “pratfall” comedy routines; contrived, improbable situations; frenzied, unrelated sights and gags. Nonetheless, out of this mad, hilarious melange came such classic routines as “Who’s on First?”

ABCs The first three letters of the alphabet. Children learn to read by studying their ABCs. By extension, apprentices must first learn the ABCs of their trade; that is, the most elementary or basic requirements. Or, a concept may be “as easy as ABC.”

Abelard and Héloïse Unlike such fictional lovers as Romeo and Juliet and Tristan and Isolde, Abelard and Héloïse were historical figures who have been enshrined in the pantheon of great lovers.

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was one of the most brilliant teacher-philosopher-theologians of his day. As the head of his own school, he made Paris the intellectual center of the Western world. He was a forerunner of scholasticism, predating Thomas Aquinas. He believed that reason could be used to prove articles of faith. His best known work was entitled *Sic et Non*.

When Abelard was 38, he became tutor to Héloïse (1101–64), the 17-year-old niece of Canon Fulbert of Nôtre-Dame. Abelard and the beautiful, intellectually gifted Héloïse fell in love. They had a son together and, to assuage Fulbert’s fury, they were married in a secret ceremony. Fulbert’s ill treatment of Héloïse prompted Abelard to place her in the convent of Argenteuil for safety. Fulbert hired

thugs to castrate Abelard. Abelard fled to the monastery of St-Denis. Héloïse wrote him passionate letters that have been preserved and published.

Abelard was buried at Paraclete, a monastery he had founded. In 1164 Héloïse was buried beside him. In 1817 their remains were removed to the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

Abelard and Héloïse are still known today as legendary lovers whom no vicissitudes of fortune, no tragedy could separate.

abracadabra Magic charm first used by Gnostics in the second century to ward off evil spirits. Like an acrostic, it was said to be made up of the first letters of the Hebrew words *Ab* (Father), *Ben* (Son) and *Ruach Acadascha* (Holy Spirit). Engraved on parchment, it used to be worn around the neck as a good luck amulet.

“Abracadabra” is a word now generally used by magicians as a kind of dramatic introductory salvo before the production of a rabbit from a hat and other tricks. It is also used as a magic incantation for any kind of inexplicable or illogical evocation, or hocus-pocus, or sleight-of-hand.

according to Hoyle Edward Hoyle (1672–1769) was a British authority on card games, especially whist. His compilation of the rules governing these card games achieved worldwide acceptance.

Hoyle’s name has entered the language in the phrase “according to Hoyle.” By extension, it has come to mean behaving honorably, fairly, following the rules faithfully.

Use: “Gentlemen, we’re undertaking a very important project. The company’s survival may very well depend on how well we do our job. Everyone will be watching us. I want everything done according to Hoyle, no sharp practices, no corner-cutting.”

Adams, Ansel (1902–1984) Photographer famous for his wide-angle American West landscapes of towering, snowcapped mountains and great trees. His pictures, which have been reproduced in more than 35 books, helped to establish photography as a legitimate art form with its own way of seeing.

Addams, Charles (1912–1988) American cartoonist who for 50 years contributed his outrageously macabre humor to the *New Yorker*. He created an Addams family, an Addams house and Addams situations that are all ghoulish. In one well-known cartoon he shows a slinky, witch-like family on the roof of their haunted-looking Victorian house. It is Christmas and they are about to pour upon the carolers below a cauldron-full of boiling oil. In another cartoon Addams depicts a

weird-looking man waiting outside a delivery room. The nurse is saying, “Congratulations! It’s a baby!” His spooky, archetypical work antedated and paved the way for “black humor.”

A Charles Addams is any weird person, house or situation that suggests a macabre sense of humor, a topsy-turvy sense of values.

Adler, Polly (1900–1962) As practitioner and entrepreneur in prostitution, the “oldest profession,” Polly Adler was widely known as “the last of the great madams” and her establishment as “New York’s most famous bordello.”

In her autobiography, *A House Is Not a Home*, Polly Adler boasts of “a clientele culled not only from *Who’s Who* and *The Social Register*—but from *Burke’s Peerage* and *The Almanac de Gotha*.” Her “guests” also included politicians, gangsters (Dutch Schultz, Frank Costello, Lucky Luciano), writers, etc. She and her “girls” worked out of fashionable, lavishly decorated apartments equipped with bars and dining rooms.

After a highly colorful career, Polly Adler retired from her “business” in 1944 to write her autobiography and to pursue other, non-“business” activities.

Adlerian In accordance with psychoanalytical theories and treatment formulated by Alfred Adler (1870–1937). Adler started out as a disciple of Freud but broke away from the Master because he rejected Freud’s emphasis on sex. To Adler the individual’s drive for power, his desire for superiority, often to compensate for feelings of inadequacy, was at the heart of neurosis.

Adler coined the phrases “inferiority complex” and “superiority complex.”

Afghanistan In December 1979, Soviet troops invaded the small central Asian country of Afghanistan in order to prop up their unpopular communist puppet regime in Kabul. For 10 years they were unable to prevail against the Afghan Mujahedeen, Islamic guerrilla warriors who controlled the mountain passes with arms supplied mostly by the United States, West Germany and Japan. In spite of almost universal condemnation by the United Nations, the loss of thousands of lives and the drain on its resources, the Soviet Union did not pull out its forces until 1989. The fire that Leonid Brezhnev started was finally put out by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Afghanistan was to the Soviet Union what Vietnam was to the United States, a humiliating defeat of a great power by a tiny country.

Agincourt Site in northern France of a battle fought on St. Crispin’s Day, October 25, 1415, in which King Henry V of England routed the numerically superior French forces. The masses of lightly clad English yeomen, using their long-

bows, unseated the armor-encased French knights, who fell from their horses into the mud and could not rise again. The armor of chivalry became obsolete that day.

Afterward, a tidal wave of pride and patriotism flooded England. This euphoric sense of destiny is magnificently expressed in act IV of Shakespeare's *Henry V* when, on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, Henry addresses his soldiers:

*And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. . . .*

A reference to Agincourt implies a triumph against vastly superior forces, a triumph of homely means against sophisticated weaponry.

Ahab Captain of the *Pequod*, the whaling vessel in Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* (1851). Ahab's monomaniacal pursuit of the fierce white whale, MOBY DICK, who tore off one of his legs in a previous encounter, ends in tragedy.

An Ahab has come to mean anyone in single-minded, obsessive pursuit of a goal.

Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp A tale from *Mille et une Nuits* (c. 1710) by Antoine Galland, published in English as *The Arabian Nights* (1721). Aladdin, a poor boy in China, is locked in a cave by a magician. There the boy finds a lamp, which, when rubbed, calls up a jinn (genie) who is ready to fulfill every one of Aladdin's requests. The boy acquires instant transportation home, great riches and treasures, a beautiful palace and eventually a princess's hand in marriage.

What has survived of this tale in modern parlance is the notion that, like Aladdin, one can rub a metaphorical lamp and immediately a genie will materialize to do one's bidding and grant one's wish.

Alas! Poor Yorick An expression used by HAMLET in the grave-digger's scene (act V, scene 1) of Shakespeare's tragedy. Hamlet has returned to Denmark, having foiled Claudius's scheme to have him killed in England. He comes upon a man singing and jesting as he digs a grave and unearths a skull. The skull, he tells Hamlet, is that of Yorick, the court jester when Hamlet was a lad.

Hamlet is moved to reflect upon the vanity of life:

Alas! poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is!

The phrase "Alas! poor Yorick" is often used somewhat ruefully and humorously to mean: Where are past glories or vainglories now?

albatross A white sea bird with narrow wings and a 10- to 12-inch wingspan. An excellent glider, the albatross was thought by superstitious sailors to bring good luck. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the mariner, out of a dark impulse, shoots the albatross with his crossbow and brings down disaster upon the ship and its crew.

*Ah! Well-a-day! What evil looks
Had I from old and young.
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.*

Only when the mariner spontaneously blesses the "happy living things" in the deep does the albatross fall off and sink "like lead into the sea."

An albatross around one's neck is a cross to bear, a burden, a curse.
See also ANCIENT MARINER.

Alcatraz In 1868, the United States War Department established a prison for deserters on Alcatraz, an island in San Francisco harbor. In 1934 Alcatraz was taken over by the Department of Justice as a "super-prison for super criminals" who couldn't be contained in the regular federal prisons.

The warden, James A. Johnston, ruled "The Rock" (as Alcatraz was known) with an iron hand. Under his stern, unsentimental administration, Alcatraz became known as America's Devil's Island, characterized by maximum security, minimum privileges, a rule of silence, prisoners locked up 14 hours a day, no trustee system, bad behavior punished by beatings and special handcuffs, straitjackets and solitary confinement ("the hole").

Some inmates tried to escape. None succeeded. Some tried suicide. Others became insane. The infamous Al Capone, master criminal, was sent here. He was paroled in 1939, suffering from advanced syphilis. Widespread criticism of Alcatraz's methods led to its closing in 1963.

Alcatraz has become a symbol for escape-proof, harsh, cruel prisons.

Alden, John See "WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, JOHN?"

Aleichem, Sholem See SHOLEM ALEICHEM.

Alger, Horatio, Jr. (1832–1899) American writer of 119 boys' books, in which the heroes begin as poor newsboys or bootblacks and rise to great wealth and influence. He encapsulated in each book the American dream of rags to riches.

Ali Baba See OPEN SESAME.

Alibi Ike Main character and title of a 1924 short story by RING LARDNER (1885–1933). Later, a comic strip.

An Alibi Ike is a person who always has a ready excuse.

Alice in Wonderland Shortened and more frequently used title for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll (pseudonym for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, 1832–98). Carroll wrote the story for ten-year-old Alice Liddell, one of three young daughters of his friend H. G. Liddell. The original illustrator, who created the definitive images of Alice and the other characters in the book, was Sir John Tenniel.

Alice, a little girl with long, blonde hair, pursues the White Rabbit down a rabbit hole. She falls a long, long way and lands in Wonderland. She experiences many puzzling changes and meets a succession of strange characters: the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, the Caterpillar, the Queen of Hearts and others. She cannot understand their topsy-turvy logic, their parodies of well-known poems and songs, their outrageous puns and other wordplay.

An Alice-in-Wonderland is somebody in a world of inspired nonsense, a world in which the rules of logic have been suspended.

All-American Originally, an honor conferred on the outstanding football players at each team position. In 1889, the first All-American team was chosen by the famous football player, coach and authority, Walter Camp, for the magazine *Weeks' Sports*. Today, All-American athletes are chosen in many other sports.

The term “all-American” now stands for general, all-around excellence.

“all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”

From George Orwell's satirical fable *Animal Farm* (1945). The animals on Mr. Jones's farm stage a revolution against their human masters and drive them out. The pigs, under their leader Napoleon, take over. Corrupted by power, they in turn become tyrannical and rationalize their hegemony with the above slogan.

Used cynically or satirically to demolish the hypocrisy of claims to absolute equality in the face of a privileged elite.

Allen, Woody (1935–) United States film director, writer, actor, comedian, born Allen Stewart Konigsberg. Allen uses autobiographical material, especially his own soul-searching for meaning in the universe. A Woody Allen movie is usually funny, philosophical, cerebral, satirical, with a New York City, middle-class Jewish milieu. His films include *Sleeper* (1973), *Bananas* (1971), *Annie Hall* (1977),

Manhattan (1979), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *Radio Days* (1987) and *Bullets over Broadway* (1994).

All in the Family See BUNKER, ARCHIE.

“all quiet on the western front” Phrase used in military communiqués and newspapers during World War I to indicate no dramatic action, only the usual attrition in the trenches. Erich Maria Remarque used the phrase with irony and bitterness in his 1929 novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, about the German infantry in World War I, because men were still suffering and dying when it was “all quiet on the western front.”

The phrase has been used in nonmilitary situations, but always with irony, as when tensions in a school over certain incidents are hushed up and someone mordantly observes, “all’s quiet on the western front.”

Almanac de Gotha The European social register first published in Germany in 1763, a *Who’s Who* of royalty and titled individuals or families.

Use: If the Kennedy family represents the nearest approximation to royalty in the United States, then the list of guests assembled at the Kennedy compound last weekend read like an American *Almanac de Gotha*.

Alphonse and Gaston A super-polite pair of Frenchmen created by the gifted cartoonist Fred Oppen for Hearst’s Sunday papers in the early 1900s. Flamboyantly dressed as 19th-century French dandies, they observed a code of highly artificial good manners:

“You first, my dear Alphonse.”

“No-no-you first, my dear Gaston.”

They were universally understood as symbols of excessive politeness.

Alps Majestic chain of mountains in south-central Europe, its valleys and peaks covering parts of Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, and the former Yugoslavia. They soar from a base of 3,000–4,000 feet to 15,772 feet at Mont Blanc, eternally snow-covered, as are the Matterhorn and the Jungfrau.

Although the Himalayas are even higher, it is the Alps that have become the symbol of unreachable height—as in Alexander Pope’s famous lines in “An Essay on Criticism” that compare the rigors of learning to climbing the Alps.

American Dream A vision of America as a land of opportunity, a land in which every individual may achieve his or her innate potential regardless of sex, color,

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religion, class or circumstances of birth. The dream drew millions of immigrants to the United States and propelled them across a continent. The dream is often corrupted to mean a mere drive for materialistic values. The tragic toll taken by the pursuit of the American Dream has been portrayed in such utterly different novels as *Giants in the Earth* (1924) by Ole Rølvaag, *An American Tragedy* (1925) by Theodore Dreiser and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

American Gothic Painting by American regionalist Grant Wood (1892–1942). The 1930 canvas is filled with a closeup of an American farm couple posed stiffly against their house. The couple looms almost as large as the house, which has a Gothic, arched attic window. They are immaculately and precisely dressed in farm clothing, the man in a jacket and overalls and carrying a pitchfork; the woman in a coverall apron over a Peter Pan-collared dress. Their expression is determined, dour, even fierce. The artist's treatment of them seems double-edged—half epic, half ironic.

The popular use of the term “American Gothic” certainly is meant to indicate satirically stiff, upright, precise and correct.

American Legion National organization of military service veterans chartered by Congress in 1919, with posts throughout the country and a strong lobby in Washington, D.C. Associated with veterans advocacy, super-patriotism, flag-waving and parades, and fervid opposition to communism.

An American Tragedy Novel published in 1925 by Theodore Dreiser (1876–1945), based on the Chester Gillette–Grace Brown murder case of 1906. The protagonist, Clyde Griffiths, is ashamed of his poverty-stricken, street evangelist parents. He yearns for the wealth, the easy living, the mobility of the world he first encounters as a bellhop in a hotel. At his uncle's home in upper New York State, he comes in contact with high society. His ambitions flare, especially when he senses the possibility of marrying the very wealthy Sondra Finchley. Unfortunately, he has already impregnated a poor factory girl, Roberta, who refuses an abortion. Faced with this dilemma, Clyde daydreams of murdering Roberta. Matters are taken out of his hands after Roberta drowns when their rowboat capsizes. Clyde is arrested, tried and sentenced to death. Dreiser, through the defense attorney, indicts society for the crime, for filling youthful heads with false, tawdry, glittering illusions. Dreiser exposes the shoddy American dream of success based on materialistic values.

America's Sweetheart Nickname given to Mary Pickford (born Gladys Smith, 1893–1979), for 23 years the most popular screen star in the world.

Pickford invariably played Little Mary, the pure, innocent but self-reliant girl with the long blonde curls and the sweet smile, just on the verge of womanhood. She appeared in many films, including *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *Daddy Long Legs*, and *The Little American*. The marriage of America's Sweetheart to Douglas Fairbanks, the all-American male, represented in real life a kind of epiphany of movie dreamland.

Now used tongue-in-cheek for a too-sweet, too-pure, too-popular girl.

Amos 'N' Andy A "blackface" radio comedy created by Freeman Gosden (Amos) and Charles Correll (Andy), it appeared in 1929 on NBC, sponsored by Pepsodent. It was an immediate, overwhelming success, one of the first truly original creations of early radio. A vast audience was charmed by its wit and warmth.

In 1950, *Amos 'N' Andy* moved into television—only to discover that a new era had come into being, demanding an end to "blackface" comedy. All black characters henceforth were to be played by black actors.

With superb actors, directors and writers, *Amos 'N' Andy* continued to charm its new audience. But the growing civil rights movement found the depiction of blacks in *Amos 'N' Andy* offensive and damaging to the image of blacks in America. Continued pressure led to the withdrawal of *Amos 'N' Andy* from syndication in 1966.

ancien régime Literally, the old order. A term used by the leaders of the French Revolution to describe the government and the governing class under the Bourbons (1589–1793): cruel, aggressive, addicted to lavish living, unconcerned about the welfare of the rest of society.

Applied pejoratively to earlier times, governments, and societies.

Use: "I was an adolescent under the ancien régime—before, that is, organized play, psychological understanding, and the birth-control pill came into existence." (Aristides [Joseph Epstein], in *American Scholar*)

ancient mariner The central figure in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), a ballad about sin and atonement.

The ancient mariner has committed the sin of killing a harmless ALBATROSS. In the course of the terrible suffering that he and his shipmates have endured as a consequence, he has learned compassion.

*He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who madeth us,
He made and loveth all.*