

With an Introduction by James Carville and Mary Matalin

THE Oxford

DICTIONARY OF American Political Slang



EDITED BY GRANT BARRETT



"A handy phrase-book to help us understand the yammering of
the Beltway's chatterati."

—*Wall Street Journal*

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Introduction

by James Carville and Mary Matalin

Washington, D.C., is encircled by six lanes of asphalt, technically known as Route 495, but more commonly called the Beltway. Once you get inside that loop, you've not only crossed a highway, but also a border into a country where the locals speak another language.

Washingtonians divide the world into insiders and outsiders. Beltway insiders are acutely aware that something about them changed when they settled in Washington. Some transformed politicians seem to enjoy Washington so much that they've forgotten their home states: they've caught *Potomac Fever*, so named for the river, once known for its malarial swamps, that flanks the city.

Beltway insiders have a term to describe those living outside it: *real people*. In meetings of both political parties, someone will inevitably say, "Can we get a *real person* to introduce the President/Vice President/Senator, and maybe some *real people* to stand behind him/her?" A *real person* is not just an outsider to Washington, but an outsider to the political processes in which *Jane Q. Public* and *John Q. Public* themselves rarely appear.

The characteristic language of politics arises because few politicians in Washington admit to being *from* Washington, no matter how many terms they serve there. Home-state allegiances are strongly maintained inside the Beltway, where you can witness the odd spectacle of a Washington sporting event where as many fans cheer the visiting team as the home one.

Once you combine those two elements—diverse geography and an altered perception of reality—you end up with a hodgepodge that borrows elements from every region of the country, creating a supposedly universal language which, in reality, nobody understands. It's a sort of political Esperanto.

Take that slapdash Esperanto, mix it with polling data, salt it with policy jargon, send it out to be vetted by a phalanx of lawyers, spice it up with some historical references, filter it through speechwriters and communications advisers—the *spinners*—throw in equal parts of self-

Guide to the Dictionary

Form and Order of Headwords

An entry begins with the headword in boldface type. The headword is given in standard form, and any exceptions are usually shown after the definition as variant forms.

Entries are listed in strict alphabetical order. Headwords with the same spelling but different parts of speech are ordered as follows:

n.
adj.
adv.
v.

Part of Speech

Words are classified in this dictionary into the parts of speech listed above. The part of speech is given immediately after the headword or after a pronunciation. The only other label used in this position is *n.pl.* to indicate plural nouns. Phrases are not usually labeled with part-of-speech designations.

Words that occasionally function as other parts of speech without any significant changes in meaning have this noted after the definition.

Noun is used to classify all words with nominal function, including single words, compound or phrasal nouns, proper nouns, verbal nouns (when not treated under the verb), and nominalizations of verbs or verb phrases. When attributive use of a noun seems frequent, this is noted; if it is especially prevalent or if the meaning is notably different, this usage may be presented separately as an adjectival entry.

Verbs are not labeled for transitivity; in most cases, the definition and the illustrative citations make clear whether or not the verb takes an object. When a distinction is necessary but the structure of a definition makes this impossible, it is noted in a comment placed before a definition or in an internal comment.

obvious from the citation text. Users of this dictionary seeking full contexts of the citations are referred to the original works cited.

Certain comments can appear before or within a definition, in parentheses. The most common of these, which show the relationship between two parts of a definition, are (*hence*), which indicates that the second meaning follows logically and usually chronologically from the first; (*also*), which merely indicates that the second meaning is related to the first; and (*specif.*) and (*broadly*), which indicate respectively that the second meaning is narrower or broader than the first. Certain other comments appear internally when they affect only one part of the definition; their meanings are discussed elsewhere in this Guide.

In most cases, definitions are ordered by the date of the earliest citation. For dating purposes, bracketed citations (see *Citations*, below) are generally treated as relevant when they clearly point to the use under discussion. When a bracketed citation is simply an interesting parallel, it is discounted in the ordering of senses.

Comments and Labels about Usage and Status

Certain definitions in this dictionary bear additional comments. These may consist of information about grammar, style, frequency, currency, and other aspects of usage. Most comments about usage are preceded by a dash, although others (such as “Now *S.E.*” or “*Joc.*”) may be free-standing.

The abbreviation “usu.,” meaning “almost always, though not inevitably,” is used before a label to indicate that “mainstream standards” are flexible and are primarily based on situation and speaker-to-speaker relationships.

The label “derisively” implies an element of ridicule or banter that makes such terms less directly provocative than those entries marked as “contemptuous.” Although many slang terms applied to human beings convey at least mild disrespect, only those senses conveying strong derision or contempt are so labeled. Labels are used only when the nature of the definition does not make its status clear; definitions of the sort “an idiot; fool” do not require labels such as “derisive” or “contemptuous.”

The label “offensive” means that a term is likely to be considered offensive by the person, group, etc., to whom it refers. Used alone, it does not imply that any offense is intended by the person using the word. *Although the “offensive” label is not normally used for a word labeled as “derisive” or “contemptuous,” such a word should nonetheless be considered “offensive”.* As with other labels, the “usu.” has been applied to terms labeled “offensive” to account for the varying reception given to

Cross Reference

Words that are treated elsewhere in this dictionary are given in small capital type, followed by the part of speech when necessary.

Citations

Citations are ordered strictly chronologically. For a citation with a range of dates, the last date is used for ordering. Citations from the same year are ordered by exact date if this is available.

An asterisk (*) before the date indicates that a citation is from a non-North American source. However, an English book referring to an American usage or quoting an American author will not have an asterisk, and an American book quoting British usage will have an asterisk. The reader should also note that before ca1820, differences between British and American slang, as between British and American English in general, are far less marked.

In this dictionary, American and Canadian English are not differentiated—neither variety has an asterisk. There are very few terms of Canadian English origin in this dictionary; see **ROC** and **neverendum**.

A citation is placed in square brackets if it does not exemplify the slang use under discussion but can contribute directly to the understanding of the history or meaning of a term; or if the allusion is clearly to the term but does not explicitly use it. See an example at the first cite under **yellow-dog Democrat**.

Dating and Bibliographic Style

The overriding concern has been to supply a date that most accurately reflects the time the word was used. The citations in the dictionary will only give the specific date of the citation and enough information to allow the reader to locate the work. Various conventions have been adopted for dating a citation.

When a citation is known to be earlier than the work in which it is found, the date of the citation is followed by *in*, followed by the bibliographical reference to the work itself.

The author of a citation is usually not given if the source is a magazine or a historical dictionary. However, when an author being quoted is well-known in his or her own right, the name is given before *in*.

If the source itself cites a date earlier than the publication date, but does not give the actual citation, the style is **1947** (cited in *W10*). If the source does give the actual citation but this dictionary does not quote it, the style is **1927** in Partridge *DSUE*21.

The abbreviation *a*, for Latin *ante* “before,” is used immediately before a date to indicate that the citation was written (or the event oc-

When quoting from a dictionary, glossary, or other word list, the word or phrase being glossed has been placed in italics.

Since the main concern has been to represent the meaning of the slang word, a source has often been quoted selectively, as by starting or finishing a quote in the middle of a sentence or by use of ellipsis (...), in order to save space and emphasize the slang use. Although the citation itself has never been altered (except as noted above), some of these abridgements may change the style of an author's words. In no case should a citation be taken to represent the viewpoint of the quoted author.

Selection

Though the number of citations does not necessarily reflect an entry's frequency of usage, unusually common expressions are often accompanied by multiple citations. The additional citations are included for several reasons: first, to suggest the commonness of the sense; second, to indicate continuity through its history or an unusual frequency of the word in one particular period; and third, to illustrate nuances that cannot succinctly be placed in the definition. The editor has tried to supply new citations from primary sources wherever possible, rather than quoting from secondary sources; the interested reader may thus be able to find additional evidence in such sources as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, the *Dictionary of Americanisms*, and the journal *American Speech*.

In every case, the earliest citation sense is the earliest that can be documented from the available corpus. With language in general, and especially with slang, due to its oral nature, words and senses may be used regularly for some time before they are recorded in print. Many terms in this dictionary were probably in use earlier than the earliest evidence herein, for such is the nature of the historical dictionary. It has not been possible to provide up-to-the-minute examples of every sense, but many senses lacking recent citational evidence are still in use.

Phrases

This dictionary organizes phrases under the main word of the phrase, usually the word least subject to variation. Phrases are marked with a paragraph symbol, ¶. Slang phrases often have so many variants that the main word may be the only stable one of the phrase. Where there is potential for confusion, cross references have been added.

Guide to the Dictionary

Eng.	English (in titles)
esp.	especially
et al.	et alii, et alia (and others)
ety.	etymology, etymological(ly)
euphem.	euphemism, euphemistic(ally)
F	French (language)
F & H	Farmer and Henley, <i>Slang and Its Analogues</i>
fig.	figurative(ly)
fr.	from
freq.	frequently; (also) frequentative(ly)
hist.	history, historical
ibid.	ibidem
JAF	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
joc.	jocular(ly)
Jour.	Journal (used in titles)
journal.	journalism
L	Latin
lang.	language
mag.	magazine
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
mil.	military
N	North(ern)
n.	noun
NADS	<i>Newsletter of the American Dialect Society</i>
NDAS	Chapman, <i>New Dictionary of American Slang</i>
N.O.	New Orleans
No.	North(ern)
N.Y.(C.)	New York (City)
occ.	occasion, occasional(ly)
OED	Murray, Simpson, et al., <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
opp.	opposite
orig.	origin, original(ly)
p., pp.	page(s)
PADS	<i>Publication of the American Dialect Society</i>
perh.	perhaps
phr.	phrase(s)
pl.	plural
prob.	probable, probably
pron.	pronounce, pronunciation
pros.	prostitution
Qly.	Quarterly (used in titles)
quot., quotes.	quotation(s)
ref.	refer(s), referring
rev.	revise(d), revision; (also) review

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What Does This Button Do?

Since the voting fiasco of 2000, when old-fashioned paper ballots proved controversial, the rollout of electronic voting machines (EVMs) has accelerated. The foremost goal of the direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting systems—the collective name for EVMs—is to increase trust in election outcomes.

Most e-voting machines work on the same principles as an automated teller machine (ATM). You prove to the EVM you are authorized, you do what you need to do, and then you get a receipt, everything recorded and (supposedly) secure.

Some studies have shown, however, that EVMs are easy to break into, both physically and digitally. Skeptics are looking for new assurances of reliability and verifiability. It's one thing to conduct a "paper vote hack"—an old-fashioned ballot-stuffing or get-out-the-cemetery vote—but it's quite another, they say, when one ill-intentioned ward-heeler with a computer can manipulate results, perhaps without a trace.

To prevent vote-hacking, critics of many current DRE's want the software which runs them to be "open source", meaning that its programming code would be publicly available. This, they say, would permit anyone to find flaws. If more people can find flaws, then more flaws can be fixed. Keeping the source code private, on the other hand, means only the vendor and highly motivated bad guys will know the flaws. As the geeks say, "security by obscurity" simply doesn't work.

Two kinds of tests would be run on the voting software. A *black box* check makes sure it operates as it's supposed to. A *white box* test examines the programming code itself, looking for bugs, *back doors* (secret ways in known only to the coder who put them there), or *Easter eggs* (goofy tricks or features that can only be enabled with special knowledge). These all pose security risks.

Another layer of security called *bracketing* encrypts all votes going in and going out. Votes cannot be manipulated after they

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have been cast (but can be while they are still on the EVM), and new votes cannot be cast without using the same encryption code. The votes are not countable until they are collected and decoded. Even two votes for the same candidate do not look alike until they are decoded.

Still other security procedures verify that an EVM has not been tampered with. An *audit trail* records everything that happens to the machine, including power-ups, tests, data changes, errors, and votes. In most cases, this information is recorded to an electronic file (called an *audit log*), and to a paper record so that it cannot be wiped out in the event of a total power failure or a malicious hacking.

Before voting begins, a *zero tape* is made. This shows that no votes are currently saved on the machine and that it is in working order. The zero tape is validated by the polling station officials and submitted with the day's results.

Some systems require a Voter Access Card (VAC)—a type of “smart card”—to be enabled by polling-station personnel after they have checked voter registration records and before a voter can choose candidates. The voter inserts the card into the EVM, then returns it. The main functions of a VAC are to permit each voter to vote only once, to make sure that a VAC from another precinct or another machine is not used, and to permit the polling station personnel to check and track each person at a polling station.

Many DREs use ATM-like touchscreens. Others use a scroll wheel, which changes the candidate that is chosen on screen, and prevents the kind of errors that might occur with a miscalibrated touchscreen. Still others work with old-fashioned pencil and paper, but without large mechanical lever systems. Voters use a number 2 pencil to fill in their choices on an optical scan ballot, which is then fed into a computer that can recognize which ovals are filled and register votes accordingly.

In a *voter-verified* system (sometimes called the *Mercuri Method* after Rebecca Mercuri, a research fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and an e-voting expert) each voter sees a paper receipt, so they can check before leaving the polling station that their choices were properly registered. Ideally, this voter-verified audit trail (VVAT) maintains voters' anonymity.

At the end of the voting day, votes from each electronic unit are loaded into a single machine to determine the total precinct vote. The result is a *totals report*, and all the paper rolls together make up the *results tape*.

Will e-voting provide more trustworthy votes? Perhaps not. Old-

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fashioned methods of cheating can still work. In one test of voting machines in Maryland, the lock securing the computer hardware was picked in ten seconds, and the same two keys opened all 16,000 EVMs in use there, making the hardware easily accessible.

As the computer geeks say: The only really safe computer is turned off, unplugged, put back in the box, and stored in a safe.

Inside “Inside Baseball”

It's no accident that baseball, given its preeminence as the very American sport, has introduced a great many terms to standard American English. One such term is the *inside baseball* of politics.

For some, *inside baseball* means the day-to-day partisan grind, the procedures and traditions, the rhetorical splitting and re-splitting of hairs. It has a lot to do with being *inside the Beltway* and the parochial interests of a one-industry town like the District of Columbia. It's about having the *inside track* or knowing the *inside*, the low-down, the scoop. It's about knowing the details so constituents and Congresspeople don't have to. It's the shoptalk among politicians and the journalists who cover them.

For others, *inside baseball* is negative: the horse-trading, the logrolling, the underhanded and under-the-table deal-making and double-dealing which make up real politics, the sausage-making part you'd rather not see or know about, but which makes the system work. It's about intentional leaks, planted news stories, and the codependent relationship of the press and the politicians they cover.

Both the positive and negative nature of *inside baseball* require an intimate knowledge of the system, the players, and the capabilities of both, just as the original diamond-shaped *inside baseball* does. Now sometimes used in any industry to describe the minutiae and inner workings of interest only to its wonks and geeks, *inside baseball*, above all, is about what happens behind the facade.

Roots of Inside Baseball

Sometimes known as percentage baseball, small ball, little ball, base-to-base, station-to-station, the inner game, inside game, inside work, the running game, and even dirty baseball, *inside baseball* became the favored term for a new way of playing the game, even over the original and once more common term “scientific baseball.”

Beginning in the late 1800s, this thinking-man's baseball focused on more strategy, probability, and teamwork. Everything that could be measured, was. Odds and statistics balanced strength and power. Proponents of inside baseball believed whipping runners around the bases on a series of singles could win more games than every slugger trying to knock one out of the park, so bunting, stealing, running, place-hitting, and the sacrifice became more important, while home runs became less important.

"What is inside baseball? Why, it's the faculty of catching an enemy off guard, taking advantage of a change, pulling off a trick, and, above all, obeying a manager's directions according to signals. That's what constitutes the supposed secrets of baseball. It's team work, hard, earnest endeavor, and that 'all-for-one' spirit." So a sportswriter for the *Washington Post* defined the theory in 1907.

Practitioners of this modern baseball included Charlie Comiskey (1859–1931), Joe Cantillon (1861–1930), Cap Anson (1852–1922), Branch Rickey (1881–1965), "Foxy" Ned Hanlon (1857–1937), and John Joseph McGraw (1873–1934). McGraw was so devoted that, as John Thorn writes in *Treasures of the Baseball Hall of Fame*, "He once fined one of his players, Sammy Strang [1876–1932], for hitting a game-winning home run—because he had missed a bunt sign."

The Baltimore Orioles built a short dynasty on inside baseball tactics, winning pennants in 1894, 1895, and 1896. In his book *Where They Ain't*, Burt Solomon writes that Hanlon, of the Orioles, eventually saw it as part of the advancement of science. "The game, like all things, has progressed, and it is today more scientific," Hanlon said. "It is in some respects like checkers and chess, and must be played upon systematic plans. Modern baseball, as played by the Baltimores, is based upon the idea to keep opposing teams guessing. It is a case of dealing out uncertainties at all times."

Not everyone agreed an inside game was a better game—they thought it was sissified or that it took a good idea too far. Pitcher Christy "Matty" Mathewson (1878–1925) was one who approached the new mode of play carefully, and in 1911 said, "Those who are too scientific stick to the rules when the rules are no good—that is worse than no rules."

Into Politics and Beyond

Inside baseball came to mean more than just a "scientific" approach. There was also an element of showmanship which relied on planning and practice, practice and planning, rather than

chance and raw skill. It also meant behind-the-scenes strategizing, signals between players, efforts to create psychological advantages beyond lucky charms and favorite mascots. To some, it eventually meant outright deception, trickery, and questionable ethics.

Baseball scandals added to the cynical view of inside baseball. There was the Black Sox betting scandal involving eight of the 1919 White Sox. Even after acquittal in front of a grand jury, they were still thrown out of the sport in 1921 by tough-guy baseball commissioner and former Federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis (1866–1944). He had been appointed to assuage the anger of fans, some who had sworn to never see another baseball game again.

Then there was the end of the "dead ball" era, when game scores were low and home runs were uncommon. Somehow, somehow, batting averages skyrocketed in the 1921 season, and not everyone was happy. The ball shot around like corked rubber. Leagues, teams, and players were accused by each other and fans of using a "juiced up" ball on the sly to improve play. Pitchers worried about getting hit with the faster ball, and managers felt it changed field dynamics too much.

"The lively ball, which some players say was responsible for some of the sensational batting last summer, has been attributed by a portion of the fans to some sort of inside baseball intrigue," says an article in the December 30, 1921 *Reno (Nev.) Evening Gazette*.

Then in 1927, charges were made against Ty Cobb (1886–1961), Tris Speaker (1888–1958) and Joe Wood (1889–1985), alleging that they had tried to fix a game series for betting purposes. Commissioner Landis declared them not guilty, which, on top of the clearing of thirty-five other players in a separate betting scandal, led to repeated cries of "whitewash!"

The accused players were given dinners, parades, and public adoration, but Landis was treated as if he was somehow the guilty party. But as noted in 1926 in the *New York Times*, anyone who criticized Landis was "ignorant of one fact known to inside baseball men, namely, that a news association which was in possession of the facts went to Mr. Landis and threatened to print the story unless he gave it out officially."

The cynicism was directed at baseball, the establishment, rather than at baseball, the entertainment. Addressing that attitude, an editorial in the Jan. 13, 1927, *Decatur (Ill.) Evening Herald*, seems to make it clear there were already two kinds of inside baseball in play: "Inside baseball to fandom means strategy, the matching of wits, the employment of deception, legitimate under the rules. In-

side baseball that buys favors, and calls for letting down on somebody's part is not the kind to keep the game in good standing.”

In politics, too, *inside baseball* means the social and political tricks and favor-trading which rarely appear in the papers, or to the voting public. But where did the jump from sport to government took place?

Perhaps 1927 was the year. Speaking at a dinner for the Cartoonists of America in March 1927, after the ball scandal of the previous few months, New York City Mayor J. J. Walker (1881–1946) seems to be using *inside baseball* as more than wordplay. Starting the ceremonies, he said, “Looking at those on the dais, you may expect to hear some inside baseball, for a Speaker, a Cobb and a Landis are to address you.”

His forced joke recognized the otherwise unnoteworthy event's status as a nexus of politics, journalists, and baseball. One featured speaker at the event was writer and humorist Irvin S. Cobb (1876–1944), who shared his name with the baseball legend Ty Cobb. Also present was Judge Landis, then holding “absolute power” over the game as baseball commissioner. He had already handled two baseball scandals, one of which ballplayer Cobb was involved. Elsewhere on the dais was U.S. Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth (1869–1931), who was married into New York's politically powerful Roosevelt clan, and shared his job title with the family name of legend Tris Speaker.

However, there's no way of knowing how, exactly, Walker meant by “inside baseball,” though no doubt he was a practitioner by the modern definition. In 1932 he resigned from office under a cloud of corruption charges, and fled to Europe.

The earliest and most clear-cut use of political *inside baseball* so far found appears in a syndicated column by David Lawrence (1888–1973), published in early December 1952. “There is a right way to play ball on a team, and the evidence thus far indicates that members of the Eisenhower staff are going to have to learn their ‘inside baseball’ the hard way.”

The negative value attached to *inside baseball* is also clear in the 1954 Congressional proceedings which ended in the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) (1908–1957). Senator Herman Welker (R-ID) (1906–1957), addressing missing photostats of telephone records, said, “Why these calls were not brought to the attention of the Select Committee, when that committee was ordered by the Senate to seek out all evidence, is what I should like the two distinguished Senators [...] to find out and to report on to the Senate at the earliest possible convenience. Some inside baseball has been played here.”