

non-presumptiveness. The term “African American” is also a currently acceptable term, however, it can be seen to have limitations for those who claim more than African ancestry. Throughout this atlas, the terms “people of color” and “African American” are used interchangeably. In some instances, such as the families that once lived on Redstone Arsenal or prominent families of Morgan County, “people of color” is the most accurate. The descendants of families from Redstone who participated in an oral history interview expressed their personal sentiment toward the identity of person of color. This identity allows for the inclusion of all ancestors who were white, African American, and Native American. Discussions of communities in Madison and Morgan counties deliberately use the term “people of color” and when it is used elsewhere, there is usually an indication of mixed-race ancestry.

Terms used in historical documents to refer to people of mixed ancestry include, “mulatto,” “yellow,” and “bright.” These last two terms may

not relate to how we think of them today. “Yellow” and “bright” are in reference to the light color of a person’s skin, i.e. “a bright negro” is a term often used to late 19th century obituaries referring to their skin, not their intelligence, and a “yellow complexion” is a light-skinned African American, not a person of Asian descent.

Historically, other terms such as “black,” “negro,” and “colored” have been used to refer to people of color with African ancestry. While the term “black” may still be culturally acceptable, it can be used in an offensive manner. In this research, it is occasionally used as an adjective to describe a noun, but never as a stand-alone term for people; e.g. “a black neighborhood”, but not “blacks.” The terms “negro” and “colored” were once official terms used on the census and other official documents as well as colloquially in newspapers or in the names of places. In this research they have been limited to quotations or discussions about segregation and discrimination. Terms used to describe people are a reflection of our current culture. The choices in terminology made for this atlas are intended to convey the utmost respect for those individuals and communities discussed within.

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