

Dictionary's definition of 'anchor baby' draws fire

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The "anchor baby" entry in the American Heritage Dictionary is drawing charges from an immigrant advocacy group that it is offensive.

Updated at 4:29 p.m. ET:

The American Heritage Dictionary officially changed its definition of the phrase "anchor baby" on Monday, reflecting that it considers the phrase to be "offensive."

In an interview Monday, dictionary Executive Editor Steven Kleinedler said the phrase was one of the 10,000 new words and phrases added to the fifth edition – the first revision of the dictionary in a decade – and that the lack of an offensive disclaimer was an oversight.

Kleinedler said he immediately realized the error when he saw Friday's blog post by Immigration Impact.

"When we saw the post, we looked at (the definition) and said 'They are completely right, we should change it,'" Kleinedler said. "This is a change that needs to be made."

The new definition, which will be included in the online dictionary and the next printing of the print edition, says the phrase is used "as a disparaging term."

Original post:

An immigrant advocacy group says editors of the American Heritage Dictionary have agreed to revise a recently added entry "anchor baby" to note that it is a derogatory or offensive phrase.

Use of the term is highly sensitive in the politically charged debate over immigration.

Immigration opponents such as Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, and others use the phrase to describe children born in the USA to illegal immigrant parents. Those children are granted automatic U.S. citizenship, and King has filed legislation that would stop the practice.

Civil rights groups have long derided the phrase, saying it dehumanizes those children and poisons the immigration debate.

The website Immigration Impact, representing the view of immigrant advocates, took up the issue last week when it criticized editors of the American Heritage Dictionary for using a neutral definition for the term, which first appeared last month in the latest edition.

The dictionary defines an anchor baby as "a child born to a noncitizen mother in a country that grants automatic citizenship to children born on its soil, especially such a child born to parents seeking to secure eventual citizenship for themselves and often other members of their family."

Saturday, the website reported that the dictionary's Executive Editor Steven Kleinedler agreed to revise the definition to note the derogatory or offensive nature of the phrase. Kleinedler said he would begin implementing the yet-to-be-determined changes by today, according to Immigration Impact.

The editors were not immediately available for a comment.

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