

This week's questions to consider: **Why is Black capitalized? Why is "white" not capitalized? Should it be? Also, why is "brown" not capitalized? Is this important?**

Pro tip: It's important. To be a Black person means something very specific. Black people have a shared culture and history and have long fought for this grammatical evolution and adjustment.

When referring to people in general, in the sense of any group of multiple human persons, we don't capitalize this word, "people". It's a noun, after all, a common noun, and that's the rule.

In the examples in the box below, "people" is a descriptor that characterizes... essentially anyone. It is a noun and doesn't require a capital letter.

Examples

- The people to the left of me are not to the right of me since, as I just mentioned, they are to the left of me.
- What an unfortunate choice the people in the front row have made. They must crane their neck to see the movie. Ouch.
- The beautiful people who helped clear my driveway last week are spectacular souls who deserve all the good things, including my admiration. They have it.
- They're the grooviest of people, those driveway clearing humans.

An important distinction, however, arises when we speak of a People.

As in, Indigenous Peoples is a term that characterizes several groups of people, which is why Peoples is both capitalized and pluralized.

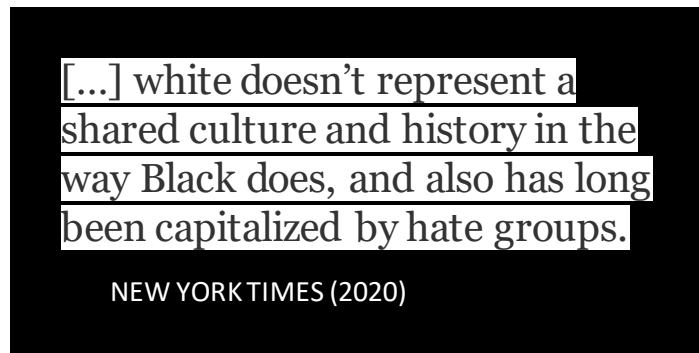
Language evolves depending on how it is used. This is clear when we consider that we require study and/or translators to access commonly understood English texts written a few hundred years ago. (Hello, Shakespeare!)

Similarly, when referring to a group of Black people, it is appropriate to give this word its due and capitalize it: Black person, Black woman, Black girl, Black man, Black human. This is a form of honouring those who hold a Black identity, and to offer a way to show their shared history and identity in written form. This is required when talking about a group of people whose specific ancestry may be unknown, though this unknown is shared by many. Specifically, those who are descended from enslaved people. Knowing where you come from, who your people were, is a part of human identity. This is way for Black people to access a sense of identity that was stolen from them. It is part of Black culture in North America. It is a point of pride, acknowledgement of a person's innate dignity, a way to recognize their history in a way that Black people themselves have repeatedly advocated for in the past hundred years.

So, we capitalize Black when speaking of people. Why do we not capitalize the "w" when speaking of white people? There is a reason: white people don't have a shared identity in the

same way. There is often resistance in even calling a person who is white a white person. It's simply not an identity in the same way, since it represents a multitude of cultures.

Similarly, I am a brown person, but I am not a "Brown" person. I can reach for another word when talking about my identity. When I mention the colour of my skin, I am literally using brown as an adjective, as a descriptor. I am an Egyptian Canadian brown woman of Russian and Lebanese descent. Since I have so many other nationalities that serve to give context to my identity, I don't need to capitalize brown. I like to mention it, because it is not always easy to see if you aren't me, and it is important to me, but it is not the only word I have to explain my identity.



There is no call or reason to capitalize white when referring to white people, since it is not a culture or shared identity. Often, white people don't really think about themselves in terms of their whiteness. They don't necessarily all speak the same language. If anything, calling a person white is a shortcut that offers subtext of certain privileges, just as calling someone brown offers a descriptor through which you can probably deduce a few things about them. Furthermore, the groups who have consistently insisted on capitalizing white when referring to themselves as a group of people are hate groups (white supremacist and white power organizations in particular do this consistently). This has its own subtext and set of connotations, all of which are problematic.

And so, to recap: Black, Indigenous Peoples, Asian, Latinx, white people, brown people.

Recommended Resources:

Video by B. Imani (Feb. 2022) [0:49] | [Capitalize the B in Black when referencing people, culture & more!](#)
New York Times Article (July 2020) | [Why We're Capitalizing Black](#)

Literally brown, from toes to crown,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
Therese Trofimencoff (*she/they*)