

Working Definition of ‘Derogatory’ as Charged by Secretarial Order 3405:

A derogatory place name is any term attached to the national landscape, its places and geographic features that a) is used or intended as a disrespectful, belittling, hurtful, or disparaging slur, b) pejoratively labels any racial or ethnic group, gender, religious affiliation, sexual identity, or physical or mental condition, or c) uses insulting slang/linguistic derivatives to negatively stereotype certain social groups or identities. All of these forms of derogatory place names have a dehumanizing effect and have the impact of perpetuating longstanding structural inequalities and causing harm or exclusion.

The immediate charge of this Committee is to focus specifically on derogatory names. However, there are other types of place names that wound the psycho-social well-being and sense of belonging of historically marginalized communities, are unwelcoming to those communities, and do not honor the diversity and dignity of all of America’s citizens. The Processes and Principles Subcommittee recognizes there is need for a multi-stage approach to addressing and reforming a wide array of problematic place names on the nation's landscape. Commemorative names exist which are considered harmful, disrespectful, and offensive to particular groups of people historically discriminated against which must be examined in the future. This process must include lengthy and transparent public dialogue with affected groups to address names that valorize and monumentalize historical events and figures with clear legacies associated with structural violence and oppression. It is believed that the American namescape must be a dynamic and responsive tapestry.