

Working paragraph, Re: “devil”

The word “devil” has a complicated history and has frequently been used in a racist context on the American landscape. In the United States, there are at least 1,436 places that have the name devil, including Devils Tower, Devils Lake, Devils Canyon, and Red Devil Mountain. European colonists, who often viewed Native Americans as godless, referred to them as “red devils” or “devils” and extended that concept to Native homelands with phrases like “devil’s den.” Sometimes the term reflected misinterpretations of American Indian languages and spiritual practices, but often it was used to demonize Native Americans. The public memory of such places is traumatic, as places named with this term perpetuate a framework that dehumanizes Native Americans. The Geographic Features Subcommittee recognizes that “devil” is a dynamic word, and that further research is needed to determine where these demonizing/dehumanizing connotations exist to better understand the impact of this name across the American landscape.