

Is 'Monkey This Up' A Racial Slur?

Activists are calling a gubernatorial candidate racist for using the term "monkey this up." The press is spreading these charges while failing to reveal that others have used this phrase in the same way: as a synonym for "mess things up."

After winning the Republican primary for governor of Florida, Congressman Ron DeSantis was asked by Fox News anchor Sandra Smith how he planned to defeat his opponent in the general election, Andrew Gillum, the mayor of Tallahassee. DeSantis [replied](#):

Florida elections are always competitive, and this is a guy who—although he's much too liberal for Florida, I think he's got huge problems with how he's governed Tallahassee—he is an articulate spokesman for those far-left views, and he's a charismatic candidate. I watched those Democrat debates, and none of that is my cup of tea, but he performed better than those other people there. So we've gotta work hard to make sure that we continue Florida going in a good direction. Let's build off the success we've had on Governor Scott. The last thing we need to do is to monkey this up by trying to embrace a socialist agenda with huge tax increases and bankrupting the state. That is not going to work. That's not gonna be good for Florida.

Shortly thereafter, the chair of the Florida Democratic Party, Terrie Rizzo, accused DeSantis of using the word "monkey" as a racial epithet against Gillum, who is black. "It's disgusting that Ron DeSantis is launching his general election campaign with racist dog whistles," [said](#) Rizzo. Many others followed suit. For instance:

- MSNBC contributor and former RNC chair Michael

Steele [declared](#) that DeSantis' comment was racist because he said that Gillum is "articulate" and "performs well" and this is "how white folks talk about black men who are successful. ... But here's the rub. Who uses the term 'monkey things up'? I mean, I have to be honest; I know about a monkey wrench, I've heard of 'don't monkey around,' but I've never heard that term used that way."

- Comedian and political activist Chelsea Handler [stated](#) that "monkey this up" is "not a phrase anyone uses. Unless they are applying for a membership to MAR-0-Lago."
- *Rolling Stone* senior writer Jamil Smith [wrote](#), "No one really uses the expression 'monkey this up,' even when they're not running against a black man for governor. It isn't whether he intended that to be racist. It was racist."

Major media outlets have amplified such claims by [spreading them widely](#) while failing to report that others have used this term in the same way as DeSantis: as a synonym for "mess things up." This includes, for example:

- Tony Award-winning actor [Cleavant Derricks](#), who starred in the play *Dreamgirls*. In an interview with *Jet* magazine, [he stated](#) that he did not like how Hollywood altered the play by turning it into a movie that depicted drug abuse. "What they are doing with it now is not what we envisioned of it," said Derricks. "We wanted to do this for the integrity of our people. We don't want the characters to have addictions. So many, especially in the entertainment industry, are moving backwards. Anything that has integrity, they want to take it and monkey it up."
- Susan Schieren, a military veteran and program manager for General Electric's Junior Officer Leadership

Program. While speaking at a “diversity and inclusion conference” about how she found great employees by hiring military officers, she [said](#), “The skill levels and training that they’re getting now make them excellent with our customers. ... You can’t confuse your client, you can’t confuse assignment leaders and managers and monkey it up with people who are not military,” because they don’t perform as well as the officers.

- [Best-selling author and culinary expert](#) Meathead Goldwyn. He [stated](#), “When it comes to seasoning, I’m a minimalist. It’s a philosophy. I like the taste of pork so I don’t like to monkey it up too much, but pork does adapt to seasoning very well.”

Despite those public statements and others, internet searches reveal that “monkey this up” is not a common expression. This makes it easy for political activists and journalists to mislead their audiences into believing that it is a racial insult.

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