

The Words of the Week - 7/3/20

Some of the words that defined the week ending July 3, 2020

Welcome to The Words of the Week, in which we look over some of the good, the bad, and the semantically imprecise words that tickled your curiosity this past week. Please note that *bad* is used here in a vague fashion; we do not really think of any words as bad (although sometimes they are a bit unruly).



'Independence Day'

Independence Day is upon us, and this means that there are certain certainties about to occur: people will have picnics, people will have fireworks, and people will spell *independence* as *independance*, an action that will annoy many. Here is your yearly reminder that English *orthography* is both tricky and **inconstant**; many people have difficulty spelling *independence*, and the word was once upon a time often spelled with an A.

inconstant (adj.): likely to change frequently without apparent or cogent reason

I can only assure you then that I sincerely rejoice in the independance of your situation.
— Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Peyton Randolph, 23 Jul. 1770

While you are in it, I know you will execute it with Fidelity to your Master, but I think Independance more honourable than any Service....
— Benjamin Franklin, Letter to William Franklin, 7 May 1774

Our open and **avowed** Enemys, together with the Officers and Soldiers of their Army, were exasperated at it, from a conviction that our Aim, at the beginning, was Independance.
— George Washington, Letter to Lund Washington, 6 Oct. 1776

avowed (adj.): openly acknowledged or declared

We define *Independence Day* as “a civil holiday for the celebration of the anniversary of the beginnings of national independence,” noting that it often specifically refers to “July 4 observed as a legal holiday in the U.S. in commemoration of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.”

'Bounty'

Reports that Russian agents had been offering cash to Afghan fighters for killing members of the U. S. armed forces sent lookups spiking for [bounty](#).

The U.S. conclusion in 2019 that the Russians were sending bounty money to the Taliban came at a delicate time in the conflict, just as the United States was deep into negotiations with the insurgents over a deal to withdraw the remaining American troops from the country.

— Mujib Mashal, Eric Schmitt, Najim Rahim and Rukmini Callimachi, [The New York Times](#), 1 Jul. 2020

Bounty has been in English since the 13th century (it can be traced to the Latin *bonus*, meaning “good”). The word has a large number of possible meanings, including “something that is given generously or liberally,” “yield, especially of a crop,” “liberality in bestowing gifts or favors,” and “a reward, premium, or subsidy especially when offered or given by a government.”

'Lone ranger'

President Trump’s assertion that wearing a protective mask made him look like the [Lone Ranger](#) greatly increased lookups for that noun.

Trump Says He’s Coming Around on Wearing a Mask Because ‘It Looked Like the Lone Ranger’

—(headline) [People](#) (people.com), 2 Jul. 2020

We define *lone ranger* as “one who acts alone and without consultation or the approval of others,” and “loner.” We typically do not enter [titular](#) words from television or radio shows (the *Lone Ranger* was the hero of an American radio and television [western](#)), but in this case we have due to the word having taken on a meaning that extends well beyond the character it originated with.

[western](#) (n.): a novel, story, motion picture, or broadcast dealing with life in the western U.S. especially during the latter half of the 19th century.

'Irregardless'

From time to time it is drawn to our attention that certain parties find it objectionable that we have included [irregardless](#) in our dictionary. The outrage presumably springs from our allowing this [callow arriviste](#) to rub elbows with other, nobler, words; the very presence of *irregardless* [besmirches](#) such entries as [asshead](#), [ninnyhammer](#), and [schnook](#).

callow (adj.): lacking adult sophistication : **immature**

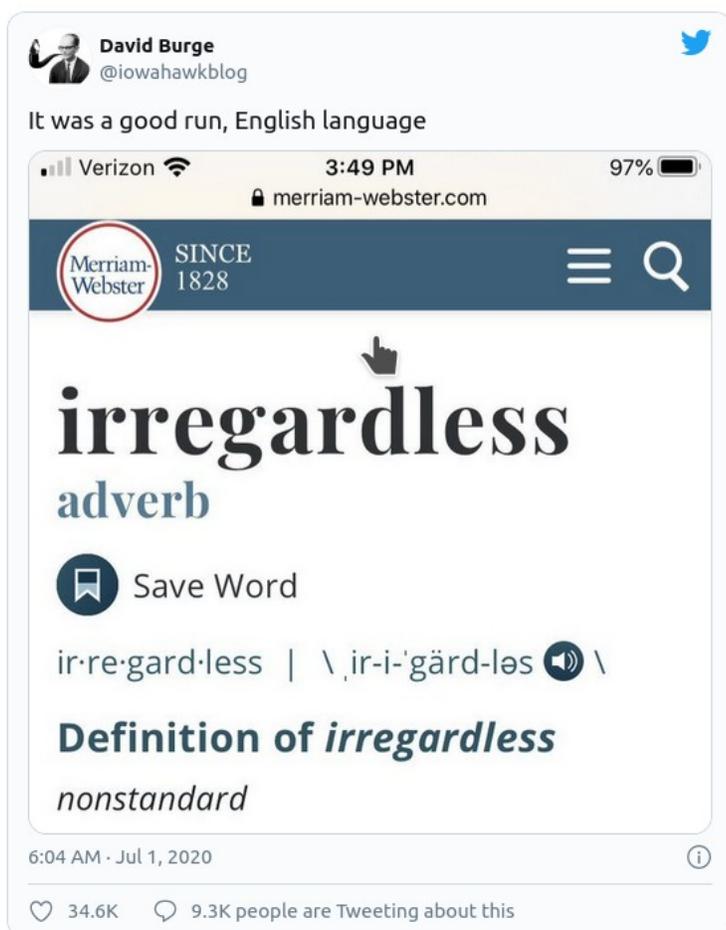
arriviste (n.): one that is a new and uncertain **arrival** (as in social position or artistic endeavor)

besmirch (v.): to cause harm or damage to the purity, luster, or beauty of (something) : **sully, soil**

asshead: *often vulgar* : **blockhead, ass**

ninnyhammer (n.): NINNY → : **FOOL, SIMPLETON**

schnook (n.): *slang* : a stupid or unimportant person : **dolt**



Irregardless is included in our dictionary because it has been in widespread and near-constant use since 1795. We must warn you, gentle readers, that there are some other words which appear for the first time this very same year that we define in our dictionary. Yes! We have allowed entry to such **Johnnies-come-lately** as **bewhiskered**, **citizenry**, and **terrorism**, all of which have their earliest written evidence the same year as *irregardless*.

Johnny-come-lately: a late or recent arrival : **newcomer**

bewhiskered: : having whiskers

We do not make the English language, we merely record it. If people use a word with consistent meaning, over a broad geographic range, and for an extended period of time chances are very high that

it will go into our dictionary. As a way of showing why we included *irregardless* we have decided to show **but** a small portion of the citations that we have of this word's use.

but (adv.): ONLY, MERELY

But death, irregardless of tenderest ties, Resolv'd the good Betty, at length, to bereave.
— *Charleston City Gazette* (Charleston, GA), 23 Jun, 1795

He was quite willing to go forward as the corrector of those abuses which really did exist, and the removal of which wold be beneficial to the interests of the country, but he was decidedly opposed to those ill-advised and useless innovations, brought forward irregardless of the dangers and injuries they might inflict on the country.
— *The Morning Post* (London, Eng.), 30 Jul. 1847

Or is it because the bloodhound spirit of an *office-seeker* will track any victim so that he can but secure the *spoils* irregardless of any incumbent, however faithful, honest, or competent he be?
— *The Washington Union* (Washington, D.C.), 13 Jul. 1849