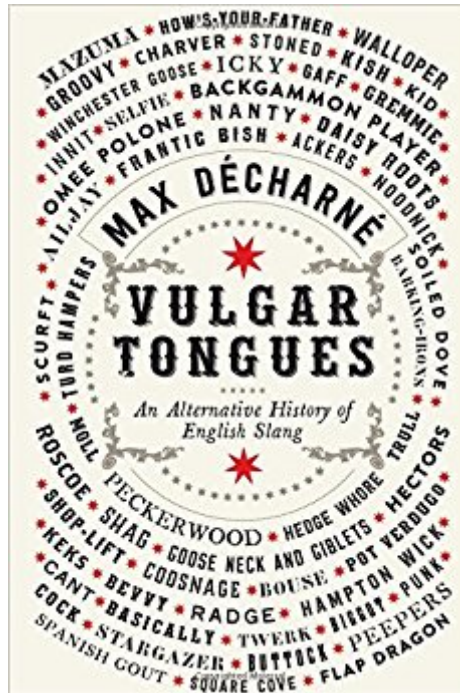


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# Vulgar Tongues: An Alternative History Of English Slang



## Synopsis

This rollercoaster ride through the colorful history of slang – from highwaymen to hip-hop – is a fresh and exciting take on the subject: entertaining and authoritative without being patronizing, out-of-touch or voyeuristic. Slang is the language of pop culture, low culture, street culture, underground movements and secret societies; depending on your point of view, it is a badge of honor, a sign of identity or a dangerous assault on the values of polite society. Of all the vocabularies available to us, slang is the most alive, constantly evolving and – as it leaks into the mainstream and is taken up by all of us – infusing the language with a healthy dose of vitality. Witty, energetic and informative *Vulgar Tongues* traces the many routes of slang, beginning with the thieves and prostitutes of Elizabethan London and ending with the present day, where the centuries-old terms rap and hip-hop still survive, though their meanings have changed. On the way we will meet Dr. Johnson, World War II flying aces, pickpockets, schoolchildren, hardboiled private eyes, carnival geeks and the many eccentric characters who have tried to record slang throughout its checkered past. If you're curious about flapdragons and ale passion, the changing meanings of punk and geek, or how fly originated on the streets of eighteenth-century London and square in Masonic lodges, this is the book for you.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Pegasus Books; 1 edition (June 6, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 168177464X

ISBN-13: 978-1681774640

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.4 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #69,505 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #88 in [Books > Reference > Words, Language & Grammar > Vocabulary, Slang & Word Lists > Vocabulary](#) #103 in [Books > Reference > Words, Language & Grammar > Etymology](#) #232 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Linguistics](#)

## Customer Reviews

“D’A’cham’s mind is a trivia trap of the first order, and the book is a bracing historical tour of the lexicons of sex, prostitution, crime, alcohol, drugs, popular music and

military slang. The most significant achievement of this book is to show how closely related some of our offensive, obscene and informal language really is. — The New York Times Book Review — “A triumph of philological research and mordant social commentary.” — Washington Post — “Whether discussing Geoffrey Chaucer or Johnny Depp’s tattoos, Mr. Deitcher proves, as he might put it, hip to the tip. He has stretched his lunch-hooks into some unlikely places in his quest for curious argot, and there’s a whole lot of bizarre information in his fusebox (or his idea pot, if you prefer).” — Wall Street Journal — “A fascinating study. Deitcher makes it absolutely clear that [slang] moves in waves through time from commonly expressed, to underground or forbidden, to aboveground again.” — Counterpunch — “A breathtaking history and overview of English slang. Along with collections focused on linguistics and the history of the English language, this well-written volume will be of interest to general readers and others curious about popular culture. Highly recommended.” — Library Journal (starred) — “Lovers of language will be engrossed by Deitcher’s excavation of the history of English-language slang. A well-stocked and exhaustively researched compendium.” — Publishers Weekly — “An erudite miscellany that tracks centuries of playful mutations endured by the English language. Bawdy and jive.” — Kirkus Reviews — “A spectacular feat, collating information from a mind-boggling range of sources — from jazz lyrics to dime novels, from 18th-century brothel directories to 1960s criminal autobiographies.” — Lynn Truss, New Statesman — “The chapters range over sex, crime, booze, drugs, war, politics, the armed forces, schools, everywhere that private languages develop and thrive. There are many good stories, and his chapters on music slang are the best.” — The Times (UK)

Max Deitcher is a writer and musician. He writes about music regularly for Mojo magazine, where he is their chief authority on the subject of rockabilly music, which he has followed and played since the 1970s. His work has also appeared in the Sunday Times (London), the Times Literary Supplement among others. He is the author of six previous books including *Hardboiled Hollywood: The True Crime Stories that Inspired the Great Noir Films* (Pegasus) and *Straight from the Fridge, Dad: A Dictionary of Hipster Slang* (Broadway). He lives in England.

I would recommend this book highly. Very good history of the words, slang, and phrases heard frequently and how and where they originated. One of the books I read this summer that I wanted to finish and kept my interest throughout.

love it. captures a vital part of life

I guess I should have paid more attention to the title. I expected a broader brush than the vulgar side.

Casting its wide net from Francis Grose to Sid The Sexist and from Elizabethan London to Bronx hip-hop, *Vulgar Tongues* enlightens and entertains in equal measure while engaging the reader much like a brilliant raconteur propping up the bar one stool down. With a presentation every bit as rich and colourful as the subject matter itself, the origins and evolution and endurance of slang are laid out in chapters devoted to drink, drugs, body parts and bodily functions, music and military, crime and much else besides. Crossing continents and cultures, centuries and classes, slang fascinatingly alters and remains the same in equal part. Absorbing and revelatory, *Vulgar Tongues* is certain to charge you large and leave your wig fried.

Too many errors to make this worthwhile. I quit reading by page 81. As examples I'll offer a few. We are told the term "chippie" is used for whore but of course it is not. A chippie is an occasional heroine user as opposed to a junkie who is a full blown addict. Oddly one of the authors examples refers to "chippie whores". If chippy means whore why use "chippie whores"? It's redundant. Chipper was the original term but chippy quickly became the female variant. We're also told "ho" is short for whore but it is short for "hole" although in much of it's usage holes (women) are all whores anyway so perhaps this error is understandable. Earlier in the book we are told that "hipster" means nerd today but that this was not it's original meaning from decades earlier. I can ignore the authors ignorant comments such as Che Guevara enjoying lining up people to be shot since the author claims no expertise in politics. This unfortunately happens often. The linguistic errors are not so easily dismissed.

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