

## The War of the Words

Everyone has their own account of the developments leading up to the war. Most follow a similar progression of events, while younger versions tend to divert wildly with their own cock and bull stories. But history is written by the winners and always retold in truth. As a survivor of the war, I lived to tell my own account and I recall these events to the best of my memory's allowance. Interviews were conducted with other survivors of the war to ensure this story was truthfully recounted. This is an honest account of 2021's War on Words.

There were rumors in those early summer days of increased combativeness amongst our teens. Initial reports condemned them as growing pains and angst, but the nights were becoming different, darker. The mood went beyond brood. My own family saw a turn in our children unlike any other in years past. Though never particularly close, my children and I, they still respected me. At least, that's what they led me to believe. I was a cool Dad after all. What I lacked in fatherly connection, I more than made up for by being hip. I said "Yo" a lot and I started watching Rick and Morty. Not my brand of stogie but I could see its cultural merits. "That's so lit," I started saying around the house sometimes, eventually all the time. My assault on the word carried from the house onto the streets. Mom's and dad's from all over the neighborhood took to the saying, using it ironically at first, but slowly allowing it to morph into earnest dialogue. "That table saw is so lit!" We'd tell a handy carpenter. "Lit belt!" A compliment we loved to hurl at one another. Everything was lit for us but our control of the word was shaky at best. We lost the word after numerous botched sentence attempts and the teens

regained a stronghold on their word. They took serious offense to what they called the “coup d’lit” and lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations. While sanctions were never levied, they did come down with a stern warning for the adults about future infractions and possible consequences. However, we decided these new teen slang words were far too valuable to pass up and decided to re-engage.

The moment I said “no cap” was teeny defined as an act of war. It was April 28th, a night the teens now teach as the starting date of the war, but for me, it was just another quiet night at the dinner table. That was until I announced that I would be selling the Firebird. I was besieged with a hail of boo’s and unbridled bitching’s, championed by my daughter and reinforced by my son. Sensing a need to press on with my directive, I pointed to the top of my head and simply stated, “No cap.” At the time it seemed cool but the enormity of such a misfire became evident at once. “Ew,” my daughter burst as she tore her phone from her pocket and began reporting what I had done to the United Nations. The initial penalty was harsh as they leveled a 30-day ban on all things “cap” against the adults in the area code. We adults, of course, appealed the decision but the Nation’s war council ultimately ruled in the favor of the teens. I am now a war criminal. Teeny, not technically, thankfully. But it was enough hostility from the teens to warrant an arming of the guard.

For years, the adults had been outfitted with weapons from one of the strongest arsenals in modern language. Spanning the history of the English language, a bit of the Spanish language, and sometimes no language at all, we had obtained no shortage of

teen slang to use as weaponry and ammunition. Our most powerful weapons fired our most tried and true words. Words stolen from the youth over the course of human speech. Powerful words such as “radical”, “bling”, and “righteous”. As new words were acquired by adults all over they were modified for our purposes and pleasures. It was a monumental day when the adults managed to take “sweet” in the mid-2000s and I can still recall the sulfurous smell of “sweet” smoke at that night’s celebration. After “sweet” fell, it wasn’t long until “chillax” followed, and “homies” thereafter. We were building an armament of strongly used teen slang over the years without much resistance from the youth. But there were moments of high tension when blood could have been spilled at any time. The early years of rap were especially strenuous with things even going so far as the Supreme Court. Thankfully, both sides were able to negotiate a ceasefire and, ultimately, agree to parental advisory terms before it devolved into a bloodbath. This time was different, however, as it became evident that the teens had finally become totally blind to just how good they had it.

In order to be taken seriously, you need an identity and the top teen brass knew this. They couldn’t attack us as a loose brigade of broken children and come out on top. They had to organize and they did so quicker than we anticipated. By the beginning of summer, we were hearing rumblings on the ground about something called “The Fit”. Apparently, this was what they were calling their little army of soldiers. Short for “outfit” we all assumed and while partially true, intel made us swiftly aware that they were also talking about their clothes. Another beautiful word defiled by these hooligans. If they wanted a fight, we were prepared to give them one.

The early days of the war played out probably how you'd imagined a fight like this to go. Platoons of adults patrolling the streets would be attacked, without provocation, by bands of teens, guerilla-style. From alley's and rafters, the teens would open fire on the adults, often aiming for their privates. "*LIT! LIT! LIT! LIT! LIT!*", we would hear their guns bang out, bullets buzzing by our heads and our lips. The "lit" gun was their most powerful weapon, and we saw it early and often throughout the war. With a direct hit, the adult's crotch would suddenly catch fire, forcing them off the battlefield and back home with an embarrassing hole burnt into their pants. The "yeet" blaster also had a tremendous effect on our soldiers. It had the power to knock any adult out of the war and send them straight home to watch Jeopardy reruns on Hulu. It was truly terrifying to witness. Their "bet" 'zooka was the most highly sought-after piece of equipment and the boost to morale was unparalleled that fateful day we finally got our hands on it.

Intel was never strong throughout the campaign but it came up big one late summer day. The war had been waging for months and we were losing adults at an unsettling pace. Their "deadass" drones were used to detect bands of adults with frightening success. The same for their "smash" scouts which were deployed at night and damn near impossible to detect while one was engaging in the act of coitus. We needed a powerful blitz, something to shock and awe these young radicals. Most of our intel came from younger siblings, those too adolescent to use teen slang and still much too dependent on their parents. Much of what they said was unreliable, due to them generally being lamer than their older brothers and sisters, but we got some good hits

every once in a while. On this occasion, little Ronnie Burger had told his parents, Commander Jim and Corporal Donna, that the teens were planning to throw a “rager” (a damn good teen word we still have yet to acquire) or a large party to the every-adult. The intel seemed strong but we needed absolute certainty. Drastic measures were needed for additional intelligence and that’s when one of the adults offered to go on a suicide mission. His name was Dave Garlow and he was a damn fine man. Dave’s son, Logan, was a high-ranking adjutant within “The Fit” and we were certain that he would have intimate knowledge in regards to whether this “rager” was to take place or not. Knowing this, Dave bravely grounded his son and took away his phone, allowing us to access critical text message communications within the device. Logan, in an immature yet cunning maneuver, had prepared for such an attack and decided to strategically delete most of his text message communications, thwarting our initial plan. But he didn’t plan for receiving new text message communications. And so when Ruth Anderland’s daughter, Olivia, sent a text message communication that read, “can’t wait to turn up with you at the party(fire emoji)”, we knew we had something big.

Everything pointed to the party being at Rudy Jr.’s house on the 22nd of August with most of “The Fit” planning to be in attendance. Rudy Jr. was the son of Rudy Martinez Sr. and Rudy Sr. *did* have travel plans to Aruba on the 22nd, hardening the intel. We devised an intricate scheme to steal one of the highly coveted “bet” ‘zooka’s, exciting our army. Every adult knew we had to have this weapon as it was sending our soldiers to the nearest casinos at a disastrous rate. Getting our hands on a prototype would allow us to break down the device and rebuild it to be used against the teens.

We'd been seeing minimal casualties on their side for some time now. For reasons unknown, it seemed the teens had a natural resistance to many of our guns and an uncanny ability to dodge everything. Our "busta" pistols, for instance, did little damage when shots landed and adult scientists have yet to uncover why. Some believe it to be the teens' heightened state of ridicule, giving them some sort of shielding mechanism, while others believe them to simply be little shits. One weapon that seemed to have its desired effect was our "sick" grenades. This was a word acquired long before the war by the great Dr. Gary Crabble, a guileful young doctor from one of the northern cul de sacs. His teen children had been abusing the word aggressively for years within his household and one night he managed to capture it from them, flawlessly. Using a very early morning televised rocket launch to lay a foundation of exasperating enthusiasm throughout the house, Gary was able to tactically rouse his children from their slumbers and march them out in front of the screen. He then repeatedly shouted, "Isn't this sick?" and "How sick is this? Rockets!", as he tore around the house in a sprint, his children rubbing their eyes and crying. They knew their word was gone. The great doctor then spent several weeks designing the word to be used as a grenade, its contents exploding on any teen unfortunate enough to be surrounding it, leaving them covered in "sick" which was basically wet tar. We used the grenades often.

The night of the party, the adults awoke even earlier than usual and were briefed. The plan was simple. It would be a fishing invasion. We would use our trusty fishing rods to cast a handful of adults into the party where they would parachute down onto the roof undetected. From there, it would only be a quick dismantling of the central

cooling system before they would be in. Knowing our kids, we figured they would leave all of their guns on the bed and floors of the bedroom. Sure enough, that's where we found them. Rudy Jr's room was lined mag to muzzle with every gun in the teen armory. Problem was, we only had so many adult paratroopers make a clean landing. Four broke bones upon launch and seven were lost to high winds. Three soldiers did manage to land and two of them swiftly breached the Martinez compound. Locating and extracting the "bet" 'zooka came at a timely cost as it was buried beneath handfuls of "slay" knives, "AF" 47's, and a vast amount of "salty" shotguns. "Extra" ammunition scattered the lot, words falling out of poorly loaded magazines. Our two soldiers, Private's Newberry and Whoval, did what they could to unearth the 'zooka, peeling away at the pile and, eventually, located one near the bottom. Unfortunately, the triumph didn't last long as a drunken teen stumbled into the bedroom expecting to find the bathroom but instead found himself staring down the barrels of two "wicked" heaters. The adults had him laser-sighted on his tiny teen heart and called for him to put his hands up. After a full adult investigation of the incident, it was made abundantly clear that the teen sobered completely on contact, set down his illegal beverage, and retrieved a "Gucci" gun from his boot. Only after he fired several high-priced rounds at our soldiers did they return fire and incapacitate the individual. Our soldiers were then able to exit with the 'zooka just as the teen was coming to and calling them "wicked smart" for sneaking in as they did.

The acquisition of the "bet" zooka was our biggest victory to this point in the war and raised spirits immensely. Our lab was able to easily replicate the weapon and it

found its way to the front lines immediately. Now, whenever we faced an unprovoked attack it was much easier to defend ourselves with the “bet” ‘zooka. A precisely placed rocket to the core of a group of teens would send them into a frenzy, resulting in what we called friendly-”betting”, where the teens would quickly start arguing with each other leading them to shout “bet” over one another while storming off the battlefield. Making them turn on one another was not only easier but it also made us feel better about having to shoot our own kids with guns. The scales of war began to tilt in our favor in the passing weeks with a great many skirmishes ending in our victory. Strategists anticipated maybe a month longer until we would see the teens yield or outright surrender. This thrilled the army and we believed it to be true for some time. And then "The Fit" introduced us to their “fire” bombs.

"Fire" bombs were invented by teens not long after our taking of the ‘zooka. Another devastating weapon of mass destruction, the bombs were capable of taking out brigades of battalions with a single blast. The explosion would produce the most spectacular of images, almost like a massive firework, usually displaying family photos or home movies. Any adults within a three-kilometer radius of the blast would be annihilated instantly. Their hearts would melt as they were unable to turn away from the beautiful family images playing out like a hologram in the sky. They would slowly drop their guns to the ground, stifle the tears and saunter off the front. Adults like Big Al the Brigadier and Captain Rhonda, two of our most experienced soldiers, were lost in separate “fire” bomb attacks along with countless others. While I never witnessed one of



the bombs myself, thank almighty, the rumors of their splendor and engineering made something inside me tickle, almost with pride. Almost.

The bombs were shrinking our numbers at a frightening pace and times were becoming desperate for adults all over town. No one expected “The Fit” to actually win the war and now it seemed only a matter of time. But we were the grown-ups here and so we acted like it. A meeting was held, led by five-star General Dammetsen. The war room was lined with every adult of high-ranking power or influence to lend their voices for victory. I remember Liza Hangton, a wily old Commander from Mountain View Road Squadron #5611, addressing the room first.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” she projected to the dark and smoke-filled room of leaders as she paced the head of the table, “nobody should be shocked to hear that we are in desperate times.”

Murmurs infested the enormous board table they were all situated around.

“And you *know* what desperate times call for.” Her voice rose over their whispers. The adults quieted for a moment allowing her to roar, “Adult supervision!” We broke out in applause, myself sitting in the corner, offering not much more than a slightly shot memory to take everything into account but also great clapping hands. The scene was uproarious. We calmed after a few congratulatory handshakes and fist bumps before Liza addressed us once more.

“Now, who’s got an idea to save this little ol’ neighborhood? We need words, folks.”

Silence fell over the war room as the cogs of their great minds began to turn and burn. Barry Meyers, a stout man without glasses, stood from his seat and waved to the gang sitting before him. “Hi all, I’m Barry Meyers out of the 6th Street Squadron #873. I love words and I’ve been studying them my whole life. I think our next move should be the taking of the word GOAT.”

Before he could express his gratitude for being allowed to speak, Barry’s plan was squelched. Shouts erupted across the table and throughout the room as every adult tried to make clear how miscalculated his plan was.

“You want to go after the greatest of all time in *our* position? Are you insane?” Esther Hamigo cried to the now-cowering Meyers. “We are still reeling from them taking back 'hella!'”

“You’re a dipshit, Barry!” Someone shouted from the back, bringing much of the chatter to a slow halt.

“Anyone else with a better plan? *Much* better.” Liza sighed to the group.

"Hrrhrrmm," a man from the end of the table cleared his throat and slowly began to rise. His lab coat hung lazily from the corners of his shoulders and the clipboard in his hands implied he was a man of science. "Hello, friends. My name is Dr. Gary Crabble." Gasps littered the room with even myself unable to withhold a joyous yelp. His legend preceded him but seeing the doctor in the flesh for the first time sent shivers through our collective spine. This was the man responsible for so many of the words we had stolen from the teens in recent years. A man that had built some of our most powerful weapons and the architect behind some of our most successful campaigns. Undoubtedly, he would have another genius plan in our greatest moment of need. We allowed him to speak.

"I respect your admiration for the English language and applaud your research efforts, Mr. Meyers, but, with all due respect, you're patently wrong. GOAT is an unattainable word." Nods and mhm's joined the doctor's speech. "One of the few words we simply cannot occupy...lit, woke, a few others... but that, my boy, is one of the bigger ones. We need to be realistic with our approach, friends, especially in times like this when numbers are not on our side. I have been in the lab for weeks now, crunching the data and running the numbers over and over. I believe our next word should be..." He paused for great effect. "Phat."

Groans filled the room as the adults fell back into their chairs and threw their hands into their faces. Liza raced around the table and grabbed the old doctor by his sleeve.

“Damnit, Dad. You researched the wrong years! No one even uses that word anymore!” Liza cried to the hurt old man. The doctor may have been a great war genius but this was a shameful moment for his existence. He slunk back into his chair and lowered his head. A woman in the corner of the room rose rapidly from her chair and held a hand up towards Liza.

“Not gonna happen, Karen, don’t even fucking ask. Same with Stan, Molly, and Tope.” Liza barked. She turned to a scraggly man stepping forward with his arms full of loose papers. “Sorry, Tope.” The man recoiled from the table, his head dropping as he settled back into the surrounding darkness.

The group grew silent as they waited for someone to provide the ultimate battle plan. We just needed to seize one more big word to help us bounce back. I racked my brain, hoping to play the hero. And that’s when Ed Ming, a Lieutenant from the Broadway Avenue Brigade, spoke up from his corner of the table.

“You’re all looking at this the wrong way. We don’t need to take a word from them.” The room fell silent with curiosity. Ed leaned forward and looked assuredly at his neighbors. “We need to give them one.” We all looked around at each other, not a stinking clue as to what that could mean. And then he laid his plan out in full. Ed happened to work as a top-level record executive at the record label in town. When he wasn’t fighting in the war, he was making gold records. He told us about the industry’s

inner workings and educated us as to the ways of subliminal messaging. There are things we can force our children to do, he told us, with this power. All we needed to do was create a number one hit song and fill it with terms we had in our adult word cache. Words that teens had forever labeled as “wack” and would never voluntarily use. But if these words infiltrated their vocabulary, it would slow them down and eventually bring them closer to adult maturity, and ultimately, cause them to lose interest in the war. This is how we would win the war, he told us. And he was right.

Arguments were had as to who would deliver the message. Many thought it had to be Beiber. He was arguably the biggest teen pop star of the modern era but there were those who felt his time had passed. Others believed Lil Nas X was the way to go. We all just adored his song with Mr. Billy Ray Cyrus but a few had apprehensions about his lifestyle choices. Ed convinced us neither was right for the mission alone but together, with a third, we would have a direct hit. It gave us three times the star power and, therefore, three times the likelihood for victory. As for the third member, we went back and forth with some of the top Google search results before ultimately deciding to give a young woman by the name of Doja Cat her greatest shot at glory. This summoned confusion amongst some of the adults with a great many of them believing the woman to be a cryptocurrency rather than a musical artist. But Ed settled things by ensuring she was indeed a woman and not a coin. So we got to work on the songwriting. The first word we all unanimously agreed on was “dandy”. It was such a powerful adult word, we knew it had to be in the chorus. And since kids love sweets we landed on the song title “Raspberry Dandy Girl”. Next, we threw in a couple of heavy

hitters with “coolio” and “far out”. The chorus lines would be: “Out in space, you're so far out, you know the dealio, it's coolio, I love my raspberry dandy girl”. Sprinkled in between the chorus were verses with power phrases such as “as if” and “da bomb”. Upsetting words for a teen to hear from an adult's mouth but out of the mouth of an idol, it becomes a command. The song was shaping into form and Ed's people were ensuring not only a streaming release but radio runs and a music video, as well. His every-base-covered approach caught no qualms and proved to be genius strategizing in the end. We needed a wide release and soon enough we got it. Our track was invading radio and streaming services by summer's end. The track soared up the charts. We chalked initial returns up to the Beliebers and trolls, but the numbers held. Slowly, but surely, we saw the teens begin to acquiesce.

In time, the teens took to the word "dandy" and it was placed at the forefront of their lexicon. The first time I heard one teen call another a "dandy ass" it nearly brought tears to my eyes. Some of the other words like "bomb diggity" and "cool beans" were a little harder to take. But after months atop the Billboards and numerous streaming records, we had reached a seventy percent infected rate. Herd immunity took care of the rest and before long, the two sides parlayed a ceasefire. The teens lost interest in the war, just as predicted, and it was their dull new vocabulary that had caused it. Our teens had been tamed. Ed's plan had been executed to perfection and dinners became a peaceful engagement once more.

The power of words can be a dangerous thing and you generally don't realize this until you've already weaponized them and murdered everyone you love. As adults, we couldn't blame our children for fighting back for their words. Hell, I'm proud to have raised a couple of fighters. But there could have been a better way to go about it. They could have simply come and talked to us and we would have relinquished all of their words. No cap. But they made their choice and they needed to understand there are consequences for such actions. Those consequences were short-lived, unfortunately. We learned, once and for all, that teens will be teens regardless of all you do for them, hell and high water. Late in the Spring of the following year, months after the war had ended, we began to see the festering signs of an uprising. Terry Vansdale had arrived early one morning to open her newspaper stand only to find it had been vandalized. The word "dandy" bore its big red rear across the old wood frame of the stand. Soon after, more graffiti began to pop up throughout the town. At first, we weren't mad, only disappointed. And then Ed's office building was vandalized. The ominous bit of graffiti had the chorus to "Raspberry Dandy Girl" sprayed along the wall and the line "I know what you did" just beneath it. The culprits were never apprehended but with that, we knew what we were in for. We were heading back to war.

## GLOSSARY

AF - short for "as fuck", used to emphasize something.

bet - can be used in lieu of the word "ok" or "yes". Can also be a response when challenged.

cap - to be truthful.

deadass - to be serious.

extra - trying too hard, over the top, or excessive.

fire - something that is really good.

fit - the clothing an individual wears.

GOAT - acronym for "greatest of all time".

gucci - something that is fancy or very fashionable. Can also be used in lieu of "good" or "fine".

hella - used to heighten something.

karen - obnoxious, angry, entitled, and often racist middle-aged white woman.

lit - something that is exciting or excellent, can also describe an intoxicated individual.

molly - party drug.

no cap - to be untruthful.

rager - large party, usually unchaperoned.

salty - exceptionally bitter, angry, or upset.

sick - to describe something positively and excitedly.

slay - to kill, to make another laugh, to have sex with another, or to do something spectacularly well.



stan - an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan.

tope - a combination of the words "totally" and "dope".

wack - something that is lousy or lame.

yeet - can mean "yes" or be a greeting. Also can just be an impassioned grunt, like a spoken dab. Additionally, can mean meandering, excelling, or to toss something.