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What does the word master mean to you? - by Jennifer O'Neill

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The dictionary definition of master is “a man who has people working for him, especially servants or slaves.”

This has been a buzzword in the mortgage, appraisal, and Realtor industry lately due to its connotations. It comes up as a common reference in real estate and design as the master bedroom. Harmless enough, or not? That is the question.

It came up for me recently in a random Facebook string of texts. It seemed to be comprised of local Realtors, some I know and some I don't. And the gist of what I was reading was angst about why this was an issue and why it would need to be changed. I will show my prejudices early here, saying it caused a gut reaction in me, knowing that these industries are predominantly white. I mean, we just read in a recent post here (Feb 2020) about the aging appraiser, who, by the way is (white, male). The finance/mortgage industry is largely comprised of white males. And I venture to say, the Realtors have a lot of little old white women. (Don't get me wrong, somehow, I hit the “little old white woman appraiser” category myself not too long ago.) Just to back this up, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data (2018) show property, real estate, and community association managers (83.6% white), financial managers (80.2% white), business and financial operations occupations (78.4% white), appraisers and assessors of real estate (93.2% white), real estate brokers and sales agents (85% white, 58.9% women). I think this is important because the people who are complaining about change are clearly in a specific demographic. And the people we serve and want to do business with are more mixed, a truer reflection of the world we live in.

Anyway, I hate confrontation or discord, but I was compelled to question people I know on why its so hard to acknowledge this word does have specific connotations. I mean, if you look it up in the dictionary and it mentions slaves, I kinda think it's a problem.

Looking up the history of the master bedroom, online data shows the first time it was widely or notably used was in the 1926 Sears catalog, used to denote the largest bedroom with an en suite bath. It is also interesting that to date, the Houston Association of Realtors is the only entity leading the industry to make an official change, using primary bedroom (June 15, 2020).

This then led me to look up classes that the professional organizations might provide to educate our industries. The National Association of Realtors offers an official certification with a class called “At Home with Diversity.” (I'm signing up for it now, it's a six hour online class. Email me to see how it went....). The Appraisal Institute hits on some of these topics in the CT Law class and USPAP, and Business Practices and Ethics, but my experience is this is a quick reference while talking about other issues. I'm not really finding a class on diversity or awareness, so again, if you see one from AI, feel free to email me your recommendations.

I guess what it really comes down to is, words are important. Words are how we convey our ideas and our reports aren't just crunching numbers, but valuing what can be the most important asset to

someone. How hard is it to be aware of others and make a change? What are the choices? Primary bedroom seems to be a leader. Principal bedroom. Main bedroom. Instead of getting upset about change, we should be proactive in our industries, showing leadership and inclusiveness. For everyone who is so upset about changing the word, I ask “why?” What is your trigger that you DON'T want to change it? It's not like anyone's asking for a limb or first born child. If we are using language that is defined with the word “slave”, why wouldn't you want to change it?

And, finally, I leave you with a poem.

“Words are powerful forces of nature. They are destruction. They are nourishment. They are flesh. They are water. They are flowers and bone. They burn. They cleanse. They erase. They etch. They can either leave you feeling homeless or brimming with home.” – Sanobar Khan.

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