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According to the 11th edition of *The Chambers Dictionary* (2008), *akimbo* means “with hand on hip and elbow out”. Such a definition explains why just about the only thing that can be akimbo is arms, and until recently the word occurred almost exclusively in the phrase *with arms akimbo*.

But more recently, usage seems to be changing. I have a citation of *akimbo* from 2001, where the author writes “we both sat with legs akimbo”. I can sort of see that: the knees are, presumably, sticking out in the way the elbows would in the older meaning, even if the feet are not on the hips.

Whether this is what is actually meant, though, is debatable: some internet sources and the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggest that it just means “with legs splayed”.

A 2009 citation, from a different author, says, “He was unshaven, hair akimbo”. That’s a very different image. At this point it looks as if *akimbo* just means



By the time Daniel Radcliffe made *Guns Akimbo* in 2019, usage of *akimbo* had clearly changed.

# Constant change

**Language Matters**

“sticking out”, which also fits with the title of a 2019 New Zealand film, *Guns Akimbo*, starring Daniel Radcliffe, of Harry Potter fame. The poster for the film shows two handguns being held at head height – whether that is enough to fit with the meaning of “sticking out” is perhaps a matter of interpretation.

I have one last citation, again in writing from 2009, but from yet another

author. “... [T]he streets were akimbo, alleys sneaking off into meandering roads”. The meaning of “sticking out” no longer seems relevant, and we seem to be left with a meaning of “not neatly arranged”, which might also fit with the guns example, although Wikipedia says that *akimbo* is a synonym for *dual wield*, using two guns, one in either hand, in combat.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites *hat akimbo* and *curtains akimbo*.

In the same Chambers dictionary, the

word *blond(e)* is linked entirely with hair colour. This, surely, is no longer accurate.

The source of the title of Bob Dylan’s album first issued in 1966, *Blonde on Blonde*, is obscure, but may refer to someone playing a blonde guitar, ie one made of blond wood.

Certainly, the term *blond oak* has had currency for some time, at least since the mid-1970s, and probably longer. I have citations for *blond brick* as far back as 1987, and *blond furniture* at about the same period.

The collocations with *wood* and *furniture* are acknowledged in the 3rd edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary* from 1997. The *Oxford English Dictionary* adds *blonde ray* (a fish).

What is striking about these words is how rapidly they appear to have acquired new meanings or new collocations. Words regularly acquire new meanings, but these are not particularly common words, and their meanings change apparently extremely rapidly. Not only that, but the new uses seem to have escaped some lexicographers, people who are typically very aware of new usages.

I suspect that this illustrates an interesting phenomenon. When we hear something that does not fit with our own usage, we assume a mistake has been made, and it is only with the benefit of hindsight that we can see that what we thought was an error was really an early example of a new usage.

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**The Telegraph**

## The Left can’t accept Britain isn’t racist

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

**H**ow depressing, but how predictable, that the cohort of so-called progressive politicians and activists in Britain should respond so churlishly to a report that praises this country’s race relations record. The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities hailed the narrowing of the gap between ethnic groups and said the UK was a model for other countries to follow. Most right-thinking people of all creeds and colours would agree, especially when it is measured against the experiences of ethnic minorities in Europe and America.

The commission, chaired by charity leader Tony Sewell, made the hardly remarkable point that family structure and social class have a bigger impact than race on how people’s lives turn out. It did not say racism has been eradicated; it probably never will be. But it did

**Viewpoint**

suggest that Britain has successfully forged a tolerant society in which people of all races can get on if other disadvantages can be overcome without everything being seen through the prism of racial identity. “We no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities,” the report said.

What was the response of the Left to this conclusion? Sir Keir Starmer, Labour’s leader, called the report “disappointing”. The BBC focused on the anger of campaigners over the commission’s failure to brand the country “institutionally racist” even though its chairman and most members were from minority backgrounds.

An entire campaigning industry relies on the perpetuation of division for its very existence. It is high time it was faced down.