

= The finger =

In Western culture , the finger or the middle finger (as in giving someone the (middle) finger or the bird or flipping someone off ,) is the most obscene hand gesture . It communicates moderate to extreme contempt , and is roughly equivalent in meaning to " fuck off " , " fuck you " , " shove it up your ass " , " up yours " or " go fuck yourself " . It is performed by showing the back of a hand that has only the middle finger extended upwards , though in some locales the thumb is extended . Extending the finger is considered a symbol of contempt in several cultures , especially in the West . Many cultures use similar gestures to display their disrespect , although others use it to express pointing without intentional disrespect toward other cultures . The gesture is usually used to express contempt but can also be used humorously or playfully .

The gesture dates back to Ancient Greece and it was also used in Ancient Rome . Historically , it represented the phallus . In some modern cultures , it has gained increasing recognition as a sign of disrespect , and has been used by music artists (notably more common among hardcore punk bands and rappers) , actors , celebrities , athletes , and politicians . Most still view the gesture as obscene . The index finger and ring finger besides the middle finger in more contemporary periods has been likened to represent the testicles .

= = Origin = =

= = = Classical era = = =

The middle finger gesture was used in Ancient times as a symbol of sexual intercourse , in a manner meant to degrade , intimidate and threaten the individual receiving the gesture . It also represented the phallus , with the fingers next to the middle finger representing testicles ; from its close association , the gesture may have assumed apotropaic potency . In the 1st @-@ century Mediterranean world , extending the finger was one of many methods used to divert the ever @-@ present threat of the evil eye .

In Greek the gesture was known as the katapygon (????????? , from kata ? ???? , " downwards " and pug? ? ???? , " rump , buttocks ") . In ancient Greek comedy , the finger was a gesture of insult toward another person , with the term katapugon also referring to " a male who submits to anal penetration " or katapygaina to a female . In Aristophanes 's comedy *The Clouds* (423 BC) , when the character Socrates is quizzing his student on poetic meters , Strepsiades declares that he knows quite well what a dactyl is , and gives the finger . The gesture is a visual pun on the two meanings of the Greek word dactylos , both " finger " and the rhythmic measure composed of a long syllable and two short , like the joints of a finger (? ? ? , which also appears as a visual pun on the penis and testicles in a medieval Latin text) . Socrates reacts to the gesture as boorish and childish . The gesture recurs as a form of mockery in *Peace* , alongside farting in someone 's face ; the usage is later explained in the *Suda* and included in the *Adagia* of Erasmus . The verb " to play the Siphnian " appears in a fragment of Aristophanes and has a similar meaning ; the usage is once again explained in the *Suda* , where it is said to mean " to touch the anus with a finger " . Diogenes Laertius records how the Cynic philosopher Diogenes directed the gesture at the orator Demosthenes in 4th @-@ century BC Athens . In the *Discourses* of Epictetus , Diogenes 's target is instead one of the sophists .

In Latin , the middle finger was the *digitus impudicus* , meaning the " shameless , indecent or offensive finger " . In the 1st century AD , Persius had superstitious female relatives concoct a charm with the " infamous finger " (*digitus infamis*) and " purifying spit " ; while in the *Satyricon* , an old woman uses dust , spit and her middle finger to mark the forehead before casting a spell . The poet Martial has a character in good health extend " the indecent one " toward three doctors . In another epigram , Martial wrote : " Laugh loud , Sextillus , at whoever calls you a *cinaedus* and extend your middle finger . " Juvenal , through synecdoche , has the " middle nail " cocked at threatening Fortuna . The indecent finger features again in a mocking context in the *Priapeia* , a

collection of poems relating to the phallic god Priapus . In Late Antiquity , the term " shameless finger " is explained in the Etymologiae of Isidore of Seville with reference to its frequent use when accusing someone of a " shameful action " .

= = = Medieval era = = =

The finger is similar to a gesture made by knights in the Middle Ages , in which they raised their lances upright towards each other .

= = = Modern era (United States) = = =

Linguist Jesse Sheidlower traces the gesture 's development in the United States to the 1890s . According to anthropologist Desmond Morris , the gesture probably came to the United States via Italian immigrants . The first documented appearance of the finger in the United States was in 1886 , when Old Hoss Radbourn , a baseball pitcher for the Boston Beaneaters , was photographed giving it to a member of their rival the New York Giants . In the film Speedy (1928) , Harold Lloyd 's character gives himself the finger into a distorting mirror at Luna Park , about 24 minutes into the film ; the exact meaning in the film 's context is not clear .

= = Cultural impact = =

= = = Politics and military incidents = = =

The gesture has been involved in notable political events . During the USS Pueblo incident , in which an American ship was captured by North Korea , the captured American crewmembers often discreetly gave the finger in staged photo ops , thus ruining the North Koreans ' efforts at propaganda . The North Koreans , ignorant of what the gesture meant , were at first told by the prisoners that it was a " Hawaiian good luck sign " , similar to " hang loose " . When the guards finally figured things out , the crewmembers were subjected to more severe mistreatment . Abbie Hoffman used the gesture at the 1968 Democratic National Convention . Ronald Reagan , while serving as the Governor of California , gave the middle finger to counterculture protestors in Berkeley , California . Nelson Rockefeller , then the Vice President of the United States , directed the gesture to hecklers at a 1976 campaign stop near Binghamton , New York , leading it to be called the " Rockefeller gesture " . Pierre Trudeau , then the Prime Minister of Canada , gave the finger to protesters in Salmon Arm , British Columbia , earning the incident the nickname the " Salmon Arm salute " . The gesture itself has also been nicknamed the " Trudeau salute " . Former president George W. Bush gave the finger to the camera at an Austin production facility during his term as governor of Texas , saying it was " just a one @-@ finger victory salute . " Anthony Weiner gave the finger to reporters after leaving his election headquarters the night he lost the 2013 primary election for Mayor of New York City .

During World War II , the 91st Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Forces referred to the gesture as the " rigid digit " salute . It was used in a more jocular manner , to suggest an airman had committed an error or infraction ; the term was a reference to British slang terms for inattentiveness (i.e. " pull your finger out (of your bum) ") . The " order of the rigid digit " continued after the war as a series of awards presented by the veteran 's association of the 91st , marked by wooden statuettes of a hand giving the single finger gesture . In 2005 during the war in Iraq , Gunnery Sergeant Michael Burghardt gained prominence when the Omaha World @-@ Herald published a photo of Burghardt making the gesture towards Iraqi insurgents he believed to be watching after an improvised explosive device failed to kill him .

The middle finger has been involved in judicial hearings . An appellate court in Hartford , Connecticut ruled in 1976 that gesturing with the middle finger was offensive , but not obscene , after a police officer charged a 16 @-@ year @-@ old with making an obscene gesture when the

student gave the officer the middle finger . The case was appealed to the Connecticut Supreme Court , which upheld the decision . In March 2006 , a federal lawsuit was filed regarding the free speech issue .

Giving the finger has resulted in negative consequences . A Malaysian man was bludgeoned to death after giving the finger to a motorist following a car chase . A Pakistani man was deported by the United Arab Emirates for the gesture , which violates indecency codes .

People have given the finger as a method of political protest . At a concert , Ricky Martin gave a picture of George W. Bush the finger to protest the War in Iraq . Serbian protesters gave the finger to the Russian embassy regarding their support of Slobodan Milošević . Artist Ai Weiwei has used the finger in photographs and sculptures as a political statement . As a political message to the Czech President , Czech artist David Černý floated an outsize , purple statue of a hand on the River Vltava in Prague ; its middle finger extended towards Prague Castle , the Presidential seat .

= = = In popular culture = = =

The use of the middle finger has become pervasive in popular culture . The band Cobra Starship released a song called " Middle Finger " , and released a music video that showed people giving the finger . Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan installed a marble statue of a middle finger measuring 11 metres (36 ft) , located directly in front of the Milan Stock Exchange . A now @-@ famous photograph of Johnny Cash shows him giving the middle finger to a photographer during a 1969 concert at San Quentin State Prison , released as At San Quentin . However , the photo remained fairly obscure until 1998 , when producer Rick Rubin made it the centerpiece of an ad in Billboard criticizing country radio for not giving airplay to Cash 's Grammy @-@ winning album Unchained . Cameron Diaz made the gesture during a photo shoot for Esquire . Harold Lloyd shot the finger to his own reflection in a Coney Island funhouse after getting paint on his suit in Speedy , his final silent feature , from 1928 .

Athletes , including Stefan Effenberg , Ron Artest , Luis Suárez , Juan Pablo Montoya , Iván Rodríguez , Danny Graves , Jack McDowell , Natasha Zvereva , Josh Smith , Bryan Cox , and Johnny Manziel have been suspended or fined for making the gesture . José Paniagua was released by the Chicago White Sox after giving the middle finger to an umpire ; he hasn 't played in the majors since . Baseball executive Chub Feeney once resigned after giving the finger to fans on Fan Appreciation Night . Bud Adams , owner of the National Football League 's Tennessee Titans , was fined US \$ 250 @, @ 000 for giving both middle fingers to the fans of the Buffalo Bills during a game . Professional wrestler Stone Cold Steve Austin is also famous for flashing one or both middle fingers as part of his gimmick .

Many musical artists , including Madonna , Lady Gaga , Eminem , Ariana Grande , Katy Perry , and Adele have publicly made the gesture . Britney Spears and Iggy Azalea have given the gesture towards members of the paparazzi , but had to apologize when fans interpreted the gesture as directed at them . M.I.A. gave the gesture during the Super Bowl XLVI Halftime Show . The National Football League , NBC , and M.I.A. apologized . The CD itself for Kid Rock 's album Devil Without a Cause is a picture of his raised middle finger . On the cover of Moby Grape 's first album , Moby Grape , band member Don Stevenson was caught flipping the bird at the camera . The finger was airbrushed out of subsequent releases of the album .

In automobile driving culture , giving the finger to a fellow motorist communicates displeasure at another person 's reckless driving habits and / or their disregard for common courtesy .

The finger is included in Unicode as U + 1F595 ? REVERSED HAND WITH MIDDLE FINGER EXTENDED .

The media sometimes refers to the gesture as being mistaken for an indication of " we 're number one " , typically indicated with a raised index finger . Sometimes , though , the " mistake " is actually an intentional euphemism meant to indirectly convey the gesture in a medium where a direct description would be inappropriate . For example , Don Meredith is famously noted in a 1972 Monday Night Football game describing the Finger of a dejected Houston Oilers fan as , " He thinks they 're number one in the nation . " Ira Robbins , a law professor , believes the finger is no longer

an obscene gesture . Psychologist David Walsh , founder of the National Institute on Media and the Family , sees the growing acceptance of the middle finger as a sign of the growth of a " culture of disrespect " .

Google Street View 's picture of the area around the Wisconsin Governor 's Mansion , taken in 2011 , shows a jogger giving the finger in the direction of the mansion .

= = Similar gestures = =

In the United Kingdom , Ireland , Australia , and New Zealand , the V sign or " the fingers " , when given with back of the hand towards the recipient , serves a similar purpose . George H. W. Bush , former President of the United States , accidentally made the gesture while on a diplomatic trip to Australia . In countries where Spanish , Portuguese , or French are spoken , and especially in Spain , Portugal , Brazil , France the gesture involving raising a fist and slapping the biceps on the same arm as the fist used , sometimes called the Spanish slap , is equivalent to the finger . Italy , Poland , and countries under the influence of Russian culture , such as Russia , Belarus , and Ukraine , also see it as equivalent to the finger , but the majority of young people in these countries use the finger as an insult , which is associated with the Western culture .

In Iran and Iraq , a gesture involving exposing only the thumb in a vertical orientation ? a thumbs up ? is used in lieu of the finger to express roughly the same sentiment . A similarly obscene gesture is extending all five digits with the palm facing forward , meaning " you have five fathers " , thus calling someone a bastard . This is similar to a gesture known in Greece as the Moutza , where the five fingers are spread wide and the palm is pushed towards the recipient . More commonly in Turkish or Slavic regions , the fig sign (also known as nah or shish) serves as the equivalent to the finger , meaning " you won 't get it " / " in your dreams " . The gesture is typically made with the hand and fingers curled and the thumb thrust between the middle and index fingers . This gesture is also used similarly in Indonesia , Turkey and China .