To the Editor:

**Let’s Lose the Terms “Master” and “Slave” From the Engineering Lexicon**

For over a half a century, scientists and engineers have been using “Master-Slave” terminology to describe the functionality of bus and network protocols, digital logic, algorithms, and more. We should stop.

As an undergraduate electrical engineering student, I was taught a mnemonic for remembering the resistor color code that trivialized rape. No rational person would do this today; were one to do so, I suspect they would be looking for a new job by day’s end. And yet, we continue to routinely employ terminology that trivializes the barbaric subjugation of human beings. Internet searches for “master-slave flipflop” or “master-slave algorithm” each yield over one hundred thousand results. A search for “master-slave protocol” yields nearly half a million results. These terms are ubiquitous in our research, teaching, and practice. We use these terms because they are convenient, and because, for most of us, they do not invoke the visceral disgust and apprehension one might feel if your ancestors were treated as property.

Over the years I have had students and non-engineering colleagues express incredulity that “master” and “slave” were actual terms of art in our field. I am embarrassed to say that I even used humor in an attempt to explain how this could be. Like universities who have found ways to rename “College Masters” to “College Deans” or “College Magisters”, surely we can stop using terminology that we should all find offensive. Here are a few specific suggestions for making this change.

1. When used in conjunction, such as in bus protocol specifications, replace the use of “master-slave” with “initiator-responder”.
2. When used to denote system-wide effect, such as “Master Reset,” replace “Master” with “Main” or “Global.”
3. For published materials such as textbooks, data sheets and functional specifications, incorporate these changes into the natural revision cycle.
4. Editorial boards, program committees, and CISE proposal review panels should encourage authors to use modern terminology.
5. In education, acknowledge the existence of historic terminology, teach the new terminology, and importantly, explain why the change was made.
6. ACM leadership should encourage affiliate organizations (e.g., CRA, IEEE, and the national academies) to consider similar changes.

The words we use to communicate matter. This is an area where the ACM can lead by example. May it be so.

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