

UF FLIP-FLOP

Back to football. Why did the cheer stop being officially used in 2020? Because George Floyd was murdered by a police officer that year and the university president Kent Fuchs – who had this on his radar for years already – felt the political environment made it possible:

“I had already made up my mind that we should eliminate the Gator Bait cheer if the opportunity arose [...] **I felt the national protests, along with the other actions we were announcing, gave us the best opportunity.**”¹⁰

Why did new university president Stuart Bell bring it back now?

We can make some guesses about the changed political environment.¹¹

REFERENCES

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What's the deal with...

THE GATOR BAIT CHEER

A friendly explanation



For half a decade, a **Florida Gators football cheer was under suspension**, then officially returned for the first touchdown under a new head coach in September 2026.

Why? The term has racist associations in American culture.

For many years, “gator bait” referred to hunting alligators by using Black people – most often naked Black children – as bait.

A WIDESPREAD IMAGE



In **1897**, a Tennessee art studio put out this photo of nine naked Black babies and titled the piece **“Alligator Bait.”**¹ Reproductions were shown in galleries across America and even in Honolulu.²

Here’s one New York gallery’s advertisement:

“Nine of the blackest little ‘nigs’ that ever trod southern soil; all in nature’s attire [...] It’s a picture that will kill the worst case of blues that mortal man was ever afflicted with.”³

RACIAL CONNOTATION

“[Alli]gator bait” became one of the many insulting ways to refer to Black people.

An **1898** news article about shoplifters said: “[T]hey are all colored and known ‘**Alligator Baits**.’”⁴

In a **1911** article about Negro League players surpassing all-white baseball teams, two teams were highlighted for their skill: “The St. Louis Giants, a black baseball team” and “The Chicago Giants, **all alligator bait**, have done the same thing [...]”⁵

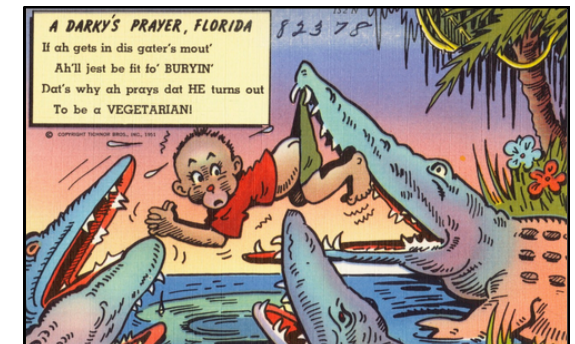
In **1965**, a white man was shot in Bogalusa, Louisiana after shouting slurs at praying Black protestors: “As they prayed, however, groups of white youths, some waving Confederate flags, began to jeer. ‘N-----rs,’ **‘gator bait’** and ‘integrators’ were some of the terms heard most often.”⁶

THE SONG

There was a popular **1899** song called **Mammy’s Little Alligator Bait**, a lullaby including the lyrics, “She told him ‘bout de alligators dat ate up black boys dats bad and wouldn’t mind their mammy dear.”⁷

VISIT SUNNY FLORIDA

Florida is especially tied to the term, with a number of tourism postcards using the gator bait theme.^{8,9}



c. 1930–1945



c. 1930