

# Movie Vocabulary/Idioms

## *Mississippi Masala*

(1991. Info at <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0102456>)

Warning: Most of the English in this movie is spoken with an accent. Nonetheless, I found most of it quite easy to understand with about 10% of the accent being a bit “thick”. You’ll need to pay special attention to pick up some of the lines.

Paying attention to this movie *will* pay off; the writing in this movie is excellent. There are lots of **belly laughs** (good, direct humor) and there is plenty of **pathos** (deep feeling). So it really deserves your best shot at careful listening and comprehension.

**Amin was evil**

Idi Amin Dada, Ugandan military dictator in the 1970s.

**Ugandans to officially celebrate Idi Amin's downfall**  
Ugandans will officially celebrate Idi Amin's downfall for the first time since the dictator was ousted in 1979. [...]  
Amin, a non-commissioned officer in the Ugandan Army who had also served in British colonial forces, seized power in 1971 when President Milton Obote was attending a summit of the Organisation of African Unity.  
His expulsion a year later of tens of thousands of people of Indian origin was originally popular because of their control of the economy. But deprived of its business class, the East African nation sank into economic chaos.  
Amin declared himself president for life, and sent out his paramilitary squads to kill real and imagined enemies. Human rights group estimate that at least 400,000 people were killed during his eight-year rule.[...]  
**Source:**  
[http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm\\_536572.html](http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_536572.html)



[“The Blues”]

Note the music that starts up once the movie takes you to Mississippi; listen to it carefully: This is the Blues. “The Blues” is a musical form originating with black people, mostly in the South. It has a simple underlying 12-bar structure, using 3 chords; the I (“tonic”), IV, and V chords.







**Holy cow**, you opening a dairy?!

This is supposed to be a sort of accidental racial slur, because cows are a sacred (“holy”) animal in much some Hindu traditions.



Where in the hell did you get a driver's license, **boy**?

When the man calls Demetrius “boy”, it's an old racial slur in the South. To call a man a “boy” is *demeaning* (intending to make you feel “small”). In his anger, the white man reverts to this old word.

...like a <b>stuck record</b>	When you repeat yourself too much, you might be compared to a “stuck record”. The actress is referring to a pre-CD era <b>vinyl plastic</b> recording, where the sound is coded in a “groove” in the plastic. If the plastic is physically damaged, the phonograph needle might play the same bit of music over and over and over again. This is a “stuck record.”				
...no use crying over spilt milk!	This is an old American saying. “It’s no use being troubled about something in the past that you can’t change.”				
...you wanker!	An insult that probably came down to Mina via the British, who had colonized India. “To wank” is to masturbate. A “wanker” is a weak, insignificant person				
“Your Dirt Is Our <b>Bread and Butter!</b> ”	“Bread and Butter” refers to the work one does for money.				
<b>darkey</b> daughter	“Darkey” is an old, insulting, white slang for a black person.				
Veterans	A veteran is someone who fought in a one of your country’s wars. It can also be used to refer to someone who’s been doing something for a long time, and has lots of experience.				
Crackers	Black slang for white folks; typically “back-country”; rural and uneducated.				
doggy bag	A bag (or, nowadays, a Styrofoam “pod”) for taking leftover food on your plate home from a restaurant.				
[tablas, harmonium]	<table><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Tablas</td><td>Harmonium</td></tr></table>			Tablas	Harmonium
					
Tablas	Harmonium				
Send ‘em back to the reservation, that’s what I say...	A strangely ignorant thing for this fellow to be saying, and probably a bit of bad writing on the part of the screenwriter. This man is suggesting that the “Indian” troublemakers are Native Americans, who are also called “Indians.” “Reservations” are areas of land that were set aside (reserved) for Native Americans to live on. These were notoriously harsh and barely habitable areas where white people weren’t interested in living.				

...just **hanging out**...

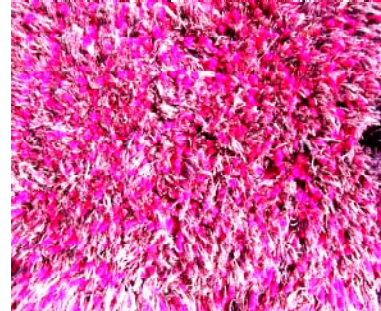
“Just being here; not doing anything...”

...cut a record...

To make a recording. Although we don't “cut” records anymore, we still call making a recording “cutting” a record.

...doing some deep shags...

Demetrius is expressing a kind of reserved pride in the fact that they have new carpet cleaning equipment that allows them to clean “deep shag” carpeting. Shag carpeting is a made from yarn, cut very long.



This line in the movie may be a little *anachronous* (outdated) since by the 1990's “shag” carpeting had gone pretty much out of style. If the movie is set in an earlier time (1970s), then it's OK.

I didn't mean to **butt in** on your man...

To “butt in” means to move in on someone's situation or territory, to intrude.

...must **stick together**...

To “stick together” means to support each other morally and materially; to be willing to *cooperate* (act together) in order to help each other to get what they want.

...do[ing] alright by...

Also: to “do right by.” To help, to aid, to do the right thing for someone else.

power to the people

A *slogan* (popular short saying) from the 1960s. This was originally a politically charged statement, typically in the form “All Power to the People”; a call to overthrow centralized authority. It originated with the Black Panther Party, a radical organization which sought freedom and equality for the black people, sometimes promoting militant “extremism;” a willingness to resort to violent action to obtain protection or political *objectives* (goals).

...those niggers paid up yet?

“Skillet” (the man playing harmonica in the liquor store) says this in reference to the Ugandans, and highlights a fact about the word “nigger”: While it is an insult coming from the white man, it's can be a mild, even humorous, reproach coming from a black person.

Don't pay him  
any mind.

"Don't pay any attention to him."

...you so  
**righteous** you  
should have  
been a preacher!

In this context, "righteous" means honest and principled. Note the absence of the verb ("you *are* so righteous..."); this is a grammatical affectation of playful black speech.

...our **Dear  
Departed**  
Grace.

"Dear departed" is a kind of title given to those who have died, and whose presence is missed.

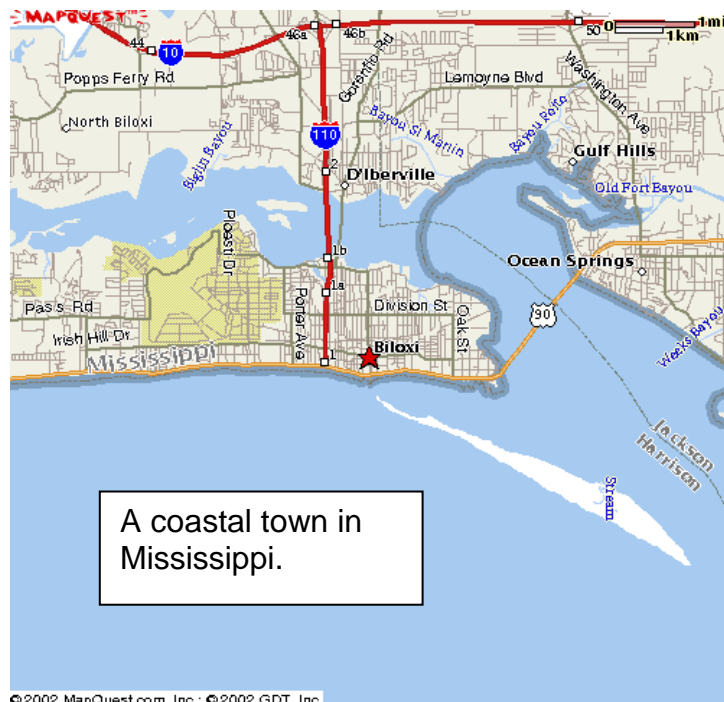
...ever been to  
the **bayou**?

The *bayou* is the popular term for the *extensive* (covering a large area) swamplands in the middle South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana).

...think I'm trying  
to **hit on** you?

To "hit on" someone is to try to get them interested, romantically. It has a connotation of being rather *brazen* (bold, perhaps a bit "pushy").

Biloxi



I'm **going on my  
rounds**.

To "go on your rounds" means to do your routine; to go a series of activities that are a regular part of your job, or some other scheduled business.

...go for a spin...	To take a quick or short drive in a car.
We are <b>in receipt of</b> your six letters...	To be “in receipt of” something is to have something in bureaucratic storage, a dossier, for someone. “We have received (and kept) your six letters...”
[wolf whistle]	When Mina and Demetrius are walking on the beach in Biloxi, listen carefully for the “wolf whistle.” This is a traditional whistle style that communicates to a woman “you look very attractive to me.”
She said you <b>stayed on to look after</b> your father...	To “stay on” means to not leave, especially when leaving is an option, and perhaps even a desirable option. To “look after” someone means to take care of them; to make sure their needs are met.
Leave me alone, you <b>motherfucking asshole</b> ...	“Motherfucker” is a very, very, <b>very</b> strong insult to throw at someone. Ditto with “asshole.”
...your <b>ass</b> gonna <b>swing</b> .	“You’re going to be in big trouble.” “Ass” is strong slang, and basically means <b>your body</b> ; “swing” refers to hanging, being killed by hanging. Here, the expression is <b>figurative</b> (not literal; no one is going to literally hang!)
...don’t <b>answer back</b> ...	To “answer back” is a kind of old-fashioned way of saying “talk disrespectfully”. Another expression is to “talk back.”
You <b>let down</b> family,...	To “let down” someone is to disappoint them; to fail to meet their expectations.
...he should <b>know his place</b> and to stay in it.	To “know your place” is to have no illusions about your social class, especially when that class is a low one. It carries a meaning of not making trouble by trying to change your class or social circumstances; to accept the fixed, <i>servile</i> (servant) role society has given you.
...I know you don’t want me to go down there with a <b>nappy head</b> , do you?	“Nappy” is a somewhat negative descriptive adjective for the texture of Negro hair. Demetrius is being subtly sarcastic to his father.

I'm <b>with you</b> , brother...	To be “with” somebody is to promise moral or material support.
You got it.	“You’re right, you speak the truth, you have a correct understanding.”
... <b>repossess</b> your van.	When you’re still making payments on a car (or anything), and you fail to make payments, the lenders may “repossess” the car (or whatever); they hire someone to come and take the item away from you.
I’ll drive transit busses in L.A. till <b>the time’s right...</b>	The “time is right” when hopes, dreams, and expectations start coming true.
Bootlicker	Someone who is extremely <i>servile</i> (playing their servant role).
...pure <b>bluff</b> ...	“Bluff” is when you pretend to get a desired result, usually to get what you want from someone; to fool someone into behaving the way you want.
...bloody crooks...	“Bloody” is a British slang adjective roughly equivalent to “damned,” and a “crook” is a thief.
...maybe my <b>shanti</b> will return then...	“Shanti” is Sanskrit for a blessing from God, or peace of mind and heart.
She has a <b>mind of her own.</b>	To have “a mind of your own” is to be an independent thinker; to develop your own ideas about correct behavior or belief.