

What Do You Call A Person From...?

A Dictionary of
Resident Names

Paul Dickson

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Facts On File

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demonym n. 1. (from the Greek *demos* "the people" or "populace" + *-nym* "name.") The name commonly given to the residents of a place. The names *Briton*, *Midwesterner*, *Liverpudlian*, *Arkansawyer* and *Parisienne* are all demonyms.

2. By extension the adjective of place. It may be the same as the resident name (*Haitian*) or a different term (*Swede* for the person, *Swedish* as the adjective).

Introduction

When the state of Israel was founded in the late 1940s, the rest of the world wasn't sure what to call the citizens of the new country. Some began using the biblical name *Israelite*. It was then officially suggested by the foreign secretary of the new Jewish state that the name should be *Israeli*. It was pointed out that this construction fit in with the style of the area which made a citizen of Iraq an *Iraqi* and a person from Baghdad a *Baghdadi*. *Israelite* was relegated to the status of a historic, biblical name.

Israeli worked, but there were many other choices that would have fit in with the broad rules for naming citizens. Commenting on the choice at the time, the National Geographic Society issued a press release stating that the Israeli could just as well have been "called an Israelian, in the manner of the Brazilian, Egyptian, or Babylonian." It added, "He could be an Israelese, following the form for the man from China, Japan, Siam, or Portugal. Taking a leaf from the book of the New Yorker, the Asiatic, the Frenchman, or the Nazarene, he could be, respectively, an Israeler, an Israelic, Israelman or Israelene." It went on to say that even "Disraeli" was a plausible alternative.

What this points out is that the rules are so broad and the exceptions so varied that such "citizen names" offer a field day for name collectors. Everyone knows what to call someone from Boston, but what do you call the person from Little Rock, or, for that matter, from Arkansas? Some never seem to be resolved. The author grew up in Yonkers, N.Y., where most of us called ourselves *Yonkersites* but a few held out for the higher tone of *Yonkersonian*. Mencken noted in *The American Language* that the *Atlanta Constitution* used "Atlantan" while the *Atlanta Journal* used "Atlantian."

Over time I have learned that people are concerned about what others call them. Call a person from Indiana an *Indianan* or *Indianian* and you will be told in no uncertain terms that the proper form of address is *Hoosier*. *North Carolinian* is not acceptable to those who prefer to be called *Tar Heels*, and when it comes to Utah the folks there prefer *Utahn* over *Utaan*. *Phoenicians* lived in antiquity and live—in Arizona—while *Colombians* are from South America not the District of Columbia, where *Washingtonians* reside. These *Washingtonians* are not to be mistaken for those *Washingtonians* who live around Puget Sound.

If this seems confusing, there is a modicum—but no more than a modicum—of order in this realm. Some years ago historian, onomastician and novelist George R. Stewart, Jr. outlined a set of principles for such names that boiled down to this: If the name of the place ends in -a or -ia, an -n should be added; if it ends in -on, add -ian; if it ends in -i, add -an; if it ends in o, add -an; and if it ends in -y, change the -y to an -i and add -an. If, however, the place ends in a sounded -e, -an is added; if it ends in -olis, it becomes -olitan; and if it ends with a consonant or a silent -e, either -ite or -er is added.

These rules work for many—*Philadelphian*, *Baltimorean*, *New Yorker*, *Tacomán*, *Floridian*, *Kansas Citian*, *Annapolitan*—but they also make *San Franciscoan* (not *San Franciscan*) and *Arkansan* (not *Arkansawyers*). Paris (France or Texas) yields either *Pariser* or, worse, *Parisite*. The people of Guam long ago decided that they wanted to be called *Guamanians*, which, if the rules were followed, means that the island should be called *Guamania*. A person who hails from Richmond can be a *Richmonder* if he is from Richmond in Virginia, or a *Richmondite*, if he is from the Richmond in California or Indiana.

H. L. Mencken was so fascinated with these rules—which he immediately dubbed “Stewart’s Laws of Municipal Onomastics”—that he sat down and wrote an article for *The New Yorker* in which he heaped a list of “disconcerting exceptions” onto each of Stewart’s laws. He also added a law of his own, which was “that the cosmic forces powerfully tend toward -ite.” Mencken found that places with perfectly serviceable names of residence (for instance, *Akronian* for a resident of that Ohio city) drifted into suffix changes (*Akronite*, officially, since 1930).

Since H. L. Mencken's article appeared in 1936, the situation seems to have become no less—and, perhaps, more—confusing as an additional rule seems to be in force: To wit, people in a place tend to decide what they will call themselves, whether they be *Angelenos* (from Los Angeles) or *Haligonians* (from Halifax, Nova Scotia). And if any new rule suggests itself, it is that as one moves eastward around the globe from Europe there seems to be an increasing likelihood that an -i will be added to one's national name.

In this matter, North Americans are not the only unruly citizens. This is demonstrated by the British Isles, populated by the likes of *Liverpudlians*, *Oxonians*, *Dundonians*, *Mancunians* and *Cestrians* (who hail respectively from Liverpool, Oxford, Dundee, Manchester and Chester). Residents of the Isle of Man are *Manx*, a term applied to men, women and cats.

Then there is the matter of France. In an article "*D'où Êtes-Vous?* (Word Ways, May 1986) Don Laycock writes, "Every French town of any size or antiquity, and every identifiable region, has a particular form for designating someone who comes from there, and knowledge of such forms provides the basis for French cocktail-party conversation." Laycock then goes on to list rules "riddled with exceptions" and "extraordinary specimens of Gallic logic," such as *Carpiniens* for residents of Charmes, *Longoviciens* for residents of Longwy, *Mussipontaine* for Pont à-Mousson and *Vidusiens* for residents of Void.

But there is more. In a follow-up article "*D'où Êtes-Vous Revisited?*" (Word Ways, August 1986) "The Word Wurcher" [Harry Partridge] claims that "...it is the poorly-behaved names that are really consistent and well behaved because, like so many French city-inhabitant names, they are etymological in origin—that is, they are derived from the name from which the present name of the city is derived." The author points to such examples as Saint-Cloud = *Clodaldiens*, Pau = *Palois*, Épinal = *Spinaliens* and Épernay = *Sparnaciens*.

What is most fascinating about these resident names, however, is that they sometimes take generations to create. A few of them still cause sleepless nights for those people who insist that everything have a proper proper name. The reason for this is that tradition, folklore and custom are in full play here. How

else could one explain the fact that a common name for a resident of Schenectady, New York, is *Dorpien*? *Dorp* is a Dutch word meaning village, which brings up the question of why a person or thing from the Netherlands or Holland is called *Dutch*.

Consider the long-burning question of what one calls a person from Connecticut. Professor Allen Walker Read of Columbia University once researched this topic and found an impressive list of early attempts to name residents of this state: *Connecticutensian*, *Connecticutter*, *Connecticutian*, *Connecticutite* and—from Cotton Mather in 1702—*Connecticotian*. In addition to these serious suggestions Read found six jocular alternatives: *Quonaughicotter* (from H. L. Mencken), *Connecticutey*, *Connecticanuck*, *Connectikook* (from Read himself), *Connectecotton* and *Connecticutist*. A fellow writer (and a New Yorker) recently suggested to me that *Connecticutlet* had a nice ring to it, and one can always side with Mark Twain, whose label for a character from the state was "Connecticut Yankee."

Although the issue is still unresolved, Read concluded that the most popular solution to the Connecticut quandary was *Nutmegger*, based on the "Nutmeg State" nickname. By the same token there are many who have avoided the tongue-twisting *Massachusettsite* by calling themselves *Bay Staters*. One rule of thumb that seems to be in force is that the longer a resident name becomes, the less likely it is to show up in print. This means that *Bay Stater* will get more use. In some cases the news media resort to generic names—local man, for instance—over a mouthful like *Minneapolisite*.

Then there is the case of Michigan, where the issue was resolved politically. In 1979 the state legislature voted to make *Michigander* the official name. The bill was introduced at the behest of newspaper editors, who were confused with a variety of names, including "*Michigander*," "*Michigandite*," and "*Michigander*." Some citizens, however, continue to call themselves *Michiganders*, a term that, legend has it, was created by Abraham Lincoln during the 1848 presidential campaign. *Michigander* is also the name given by H. L. Mencken in *The American Language*. *Michigandite* is given in several reference

books—including the (U.S.) Government Printing Office *Style Manual*—not published in Michigan.

All other concerns of this type seem to pale in comparison with the peculiar case of the word *Hoosier*, which transcends the simple matter of usage and form and stirs the emotions. For instance, one thing that will prompt letters to the editor of any newspaper in the country is to use the word *Indianan* in print. A quick letter by a son or daughter of Indiana will inform the paper in no uncertain terms that the proper native term is *Hoosier*. A letter published in the April 11, 1987 *Washington Post* is typical: "A Sports headline March 27 referred to 'Indianans.' My husband is in the service, and in all of our travels, this is the first time I've heard the term 'Indianan.' Please try to get it right next time."

With full realization that these questions are not among the great issues of our time, but that they are important points of local pride and proper usage, I have assembled a collection of resident names.

One nagging detail that accompanied this project was that these terms of residency have no commonly accepted name (*patrial*, *ethnonym*, *gentilitial* and *ethnic* have been suggested but not accepted). At the outset I needed to give my file a name, so I thought that until something better came along I would label it *domunyms* (*domus*, Latin for home, and *nym*, for name). There were other suggestions—including *hailfroms* (as in, "Where do you hail from?") from writer and editor Bruce O. Boston of Reston, Virginia; two suggestions from Monique M. Byer of Springfield, Virginia: *locunym* (from the Latin word *locus* for "place") and *urbanym* (from the Latin *urbs* for "city"); and the idea from Canadian geographer Alan Rayburn to use the proper French word *gentilé* (jawn-tee-lay), which he suggested in the *Canadian Geographic*—but I stuck with *domunyms*.

After publishing several articles on my collection, including one that appeared in the March 1988 *Smithsonian* magazine, I got several letters noting that I could use some help with my neologism. The most compelling case was made by George H. Scheetz, director of the Sioux City Public Library and a member of the American Name Society and the North Central Name

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Society who has actually made a study of words with a *-nym* ending. Quoting the pertinent part of his letter:

...All but two historically occurring words ending in *-nym* actually end in *-onym*, and all but approximately six percent are formed from Greek root words.

In other words, the Latin root *dom-* (from *domus*), more correctly forms *domonym*. However, the Greek root is already in use as a combining form, *domato-* (from *domatos*), which forms *domatonym*. Literally, both these combinations mean "a house name." The names Tara and The White House are domatonyms.

A better word for the name, derived from a place name, for resident of that place, is *demonym*, from the Greek *demos*, "the people, populace." The names Utahn and Sioux Cityan are demonyms.

Finding *demonyms* has become something of a minor obsession. I once actually got hold of a Kentucky newspaper for the single purpose of making sure that local preference was for *Louisvillians* over *Louisvillans*. Of late I have taken to writing friends and associates around the country to find out what they call themselves. The best answer to date has come from South Dakotan Bill McKean: "People from Sioux Falls are called PEOPLE FROM SIOUX FALLS. There *are* limits."

Several letters asked me for help, including one from a resident of Sanibel Island, Florida, who wanted to know if she was a *Sanibelian*, *Sanibelyan*, or a *Sanibelan*. The author of a letter to the *Elmira* (N.Y.) *Star-Gazette*, Geof Huth, wrote of the dilemma of living in Horseheads, N.Y.: "I've been living in Horseheads for over a year, but I haven't heard anyone use a word that means 'someone from Horseheads.' What could that word possibly be?"

As it became apparent that there was no central source of these geographical names, the collection seemed to take on a new cast. Why not use it as the basis for a full-fledged reference book on the subject?

But a few anecdotes do not a reference book make, so I decided to approach it in a comprehensive manner by relying on a variety of sources. These ranged from such entities as the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency, which have

grappled with the issue officially, to newspapers and newspaper editors, who have dealt with it locally. After all, if the *Cedar Rapids* (Iowa) *Gazette* uses the term *Cedar Rapiidian* to describe its subscribers, there is no need to look any further.

A major source of information in this question was the Tamony Collection at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri. This is the nation's prime archive of unconventional American English—slang, jargon and regionalisms—and brims with references bearing directly on this project. I have also solicited letters from linguists, folklorists, and residents of far-flung spots on the globe. One of the reasons for all of this correspondence was to get a sense of what term is preferred and used locally. The principle at work here is that of "home rule." If the people of Albany, N.Y., choose to be known as *Albanians*, so be it, even though their choice tends to confuse the residents of that city with the people of far-off Albania. This makes the neologism *demonym* all the more appropriate, because it stems from the same root as "democratic."

Despite this, it must be pointed out that many of the *demonyms* from non-English-speaking areas are also *exonyms*, a long-accepted term for a place name given by a foreigner that does not correspond to the native name. In English, the names Naples and Vienna are *exonyms* because in Italy and Austria those places are called Napoli and Wien. In fact, Italy and Austria are *exonyms* for Italia and Österreich.

Periodically, an effort is launched to iron out these inconsistencies but it never seems to work. The problem was demonstrated in 1967 when the United Nations held a conference on name standardization in Geneva, which, depending on where a delegate came from, was called, Genf, Genève, Ginevra, Geneva and Ginebra. This collection is unabashedly *exonymic* and does not attempt to propose any reforms. It hereby acknowledges the fact that *Barcelonians* are *Barceloneses* in Barcelona and Bogotá but not in London or New York.

The one great exception to this English-speaking *exonymia* are French *demonyms*. The reason for this is not clear; perhaps it has something to do with a custom that began because of the nearness of England to France. The French examples also tend

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to be among the most complex, so they may have held a particular fascination for tourists, travel writers and Francophiles.

What has emerged from this effort is a reference book meant to be used by those who want to find the proper form—or forms—of address. And, if one accepts the conclusion that people do care about what they are called, whether it be in person or in print, then the collection should be useful. I was once told by an executive of a dictionary company that one of the great services a reference book can accomplish is to help people “keep egg off their face.” This collection was assembled with that worthy premise in mind.

Special Thanks

A full list of helpers appears at the end of the book, but several individuals contributed so much to this effort that it would be impolite not to acknowledge their contribution here and now. The first is researcher and *Houstonian* Charles D. Poe, who located and annotated hundreds of written examples. The second is Senior Manuscript Specialist Randy Robert of the University of Missouri, who dug up additional hundreds of examples from the aforementioned Tamony Collection. The third is *Londoner* Denys Parsons, who scouted terms throughout the rest of the English-speaking world. *Queenslander* Bill Scott helped with the Australian examples, *Ontarian* Jay Ames with Canadian names and nicknames, and *Texan* C. F. Eckhardt guided the author through the complexity of Lone Star labels.

These individuals along with many other helpers put the flesh on the bones of this project.

Two outside experts Dr. Reinhold Aman, editor of *Maledicta*, and Ross Eckler, editor of *Word Ways*, were kind enough to read through the original manuscript, finding major and minor errors. I cannot thank them enough for this help.

How to Use This Book

The book is organized in simple dictionary form in which all *demonyms* are italicized. Most entries are for the place rather than the *demonym*. One finds what a resident of Los Angeles is called by looking under Los Angeles. In addition, some italicized *demonyms* are listed as separate entries. These are the *demonyms* or terms of residence that do *not* conform directly to the name of the place. *Angeleno* is listed (as a resident of Los Angeles) because it does not conform with the name of the place, just as *Yankee* (for a *New Englander*) rates a separate entry. The number of these entries is much smaller as they list only those terms that are not derivative or are derivatives that deviate from the first three letters (four in more complicated cases) of the name of the place; hence *New Yorker* is not listed but *Bengalee* is because it differs from the beginning of *Bangladesh*.

While most entries are short and to the point, others include discussions that put them into a larger social context, especially those that have created controversy and debate. Terms that are not derivative of their place—*Sooner*, *Tar Heel*, etc.—are discussed in terms of their etymology.

The criteria used to decide what to include were simple and subjective: (1) To deal with all nations, major cities, states of the Union and Canadian provinces. (2) To deal with small places that pose unusual problems (what do you call residents of the French village of Y?) or that are small but noteworthy (there is, for example, an entry for the Pitcairn Islands, which at last count, had only 48 residents but is often written about, because those 48 souls descend from the crew of the HMS *Bounty* that mutinied about 200 years ago). There are so many unusual French examples that only the more important and unusual of

these could be listed. Fortunately, these French examples are fully demonstrated in the *Larousse* dictionaries (the *Petit Larousse* contains more than 700).

Although the book shies away from the ethnic slurs, it does include slurs, slang and nicknames based on geography. Inevitably, this includes some terms like *Okie*, *Cracker*, *Canuck*, and *Herring Choker* that are regarded—or can be regarded in certain contexts—as derogatory. The idea here is not to offend anyone or venerate mean slurs but rather to put such terms in context and give the reader some idea of if and when they are offensive. For an exploration of how a term becomes a slur, see the long entry under *Dutch*.

Although the bulk of the words in the books are nouns, an attempt has been made to list adjectives of nationality that differ from the noun, such as in this entry:

Burundi (Republic of Burundi). *Burundian*. Adjective: *Burundi*.

This sample also illustrates the fact that common names are listed (Burundi) with the official name of the country following (Republic of Burundi) if the official name is different from the common name.

In addition, some common nicknames have been included to add to the reference value of the book. It would, for instance, be misleading to discuss the names *New Yorker* and New York City and not mention the Big Apple and Gotham. State nicknames, even those that have become archaic, are listed for the same reason. Similarly, some derivative forms of place names are listed and explained. The terms *Africana* and *Africanist*, for instance, appear under the Africa entry.

In the same vein, places whose names have changed since World War II have been annotated to include the former name. Selected obsolete names are included, as well as some generic terms on the order of *citizen*, *resident*, *native* and *exurbanite*. Planetary adjectives have been included. This was not done just because they were interesting entries but for the practical reason that they have already provided their share of controversy, such as can be seen under the entry for the planet Venus.