62 Last Name Meanings - mental_floss List Show (Ep. 231)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green. Welcome to my salon. This is Mental Floss on YouTube and did you know that the last name Green has been around since before the 7th century? You could have gotten that name by playing the role of "green man" on May Day which involved dressing in green and leaves. But people were also given the name Green if they just liked wearing the color green a lot. Which is probably how my people got it. Anyway, that's the first of many last name meanings I'm going to share with you today in this video brought to you by our friends at Geico.

(Intro Music)

Smith is an Old English name that was given to those who worked with metal. It's probably related to a word that meant "to strike". Similarly, Schmidt is a German name meaning metalworker or blacksmith. The popular Spanish last name Lopez came from the Latin world for wolf. The ancient Aramaic word for twin gave us the name Thomas. And Hill is an English name referring to someone who, get this, lived on a hill. Other people got the name, not from location, but from the name Hildebrand or Hilliard. In parts of England, Lynch meant someone who lived by a hill. In Ireland though, it may have meant seaman. You know, a person who goes to sea. Sail, you tiny might heroes! Get your mind out of the gutter.

Novak came from the Slovak word new or newcomer. And Murphy derived from the Irish term for sea warrior, which is very different from a seaman because war! The Visigothic word for man gave us the last name Gomez. And if your last name is Cook, you probably have some ancestors who did that for a living. Same goes for Baker and Baxter, was the word for a female baker. Becker is the German version of baker. And the surname Hall is also named after an occupation. They were the people who worked in a house or a hall.

In England and Scotland, the name Adams was created to mean "son of Adam" which you know, all men are. They borrowed the Adam part from Hebrew, of course. Similarly, Rogers means "son of Roger", although Roger isn't like the first man in an alternate version of the Bible. His name comes from the legend of the Danish king Hrothgar, who can be found in Beowulf. Hrothgar, by the way, means "famous spear."

There are, of course, a ton of these sons. Let's just get a bunch out of the way. Thompson is Celtic, meaning either "son of Tom" or referring to the place Thompson in Norfolk. Robinson could be the son of either Robin or Robert. Roberts, of course, "son of Robert". And Robert means "fame and bright". Both Johnson and Jones mean "the son of John". The name John comes from the Hebrew *Yohanan*, which means "Yahweh has been gracious". The name Jack is also derived from *Yohanan* so Jacksons and Johnsons are really kinda the same. Evans means "son of Evan", a name which changes meaning depending on your background. In Welsh, it also evolved from *Yohanan*. In Celtic, it means "young warrior". We're learning a lot about what people used to value: warriors, fame, religion, hills.

The Spanish last name Martinez means "son of Martin" and Martin comes from the Roman god of war, Mars. The Greek word for manly gave us Anders and Andrew, and therefore Anderson. The "Wil" in Wilson is from the Germanic word meaning "desire" - I gotta tell my friend Wil Wheaton that. Hey, hey, Wil, your name means "desire". All right, I told him. And Olsen, the last name of our beloved Mental Floss executive producer, mean "son of Ole" and the name Ole came from an Old Norse word meaning "ancestors' descendants". So I guess the Olsens of the world are the sons of ancestors' descendants. Philips, of course, is "son of Philip". The Greek name Philippos, meaning "lover of horses", gave us the name Philip.

The name Fox was taken from the animal's name. It's one of those last names that started out as a nickname. Usually, people who were called Fox were clever or else had red hair or both (probably just one or the other). Then there's the name Russell, which is an Anglo-Norman word meaning "red haired" or even "red-skinned". Similarly, White was a nickname first, probably referring to a person who had white hair or a very light complexion. And Brown was someone who had brown hair or wore a lot of brown clothes. But really, wasn't that everyone in like the 5th century? I guess that explains why there are so many Browns.

The popular Korean surname Kim means "gold", and the Chinese name Li can also mean "plum". The L-e-e version of Lee comes from an Old English word meaning "meadow".

Stewart is a Scottish name meaning "household guardian," so that would be the person who, like, handled administrative tasks for a big royal household. And Clark comes from the occupation of scribe. So, I live near a hill and I'm something of a scribe, so I guess I would be a Lynchclark?

Walker could have been someone who did fulling, which was walking on cloth to improve its quality. Another occupation related to that name: military officers who would monitor a forest area by, you know, walking. So you're like an officer of the sky! Oh, hey there, lobster.

Allen means "handsome", as anyone who has ever seen Tim Allen could tell you. In English, the name Myers derived from those who were the son of the mayor. In German, on the other hand, it meant "town magistrate". Cohen is Hebrew for "priest", Parker was either a gamekeeper or a park keeper. An Old English word meaning "worker" gave us the name Wright and Carter is also English. It originally referred to a job in which someone would transport goods via cart, hence Cart-er.

Schneider means "tailor" in German, the English version, of course, is Taylor, and Muller meant someone who operated a mill. Miller is the English version of that. In England, a "Cooper" was someone who either made barrels or casks or else Mini Coopers.

Moore has a few different meanings. It may have meant someone who lived by a moor or someone who worked on boats, or someone who was dark-skinned, like Othello. In Old English, Perry meant someone who spent time near a pear tree. In French, it was someone who worked in a quarry.

Turner also has a couple different origins. It might mean "turn hare", or someone who can run faster than a hare. It could also mean "one who works with a lathe". In Portuguese and Spanish, Torres means "tower" so someone with that last name was someone who lived by a tower. The German surname Hoffman meant someone who was a steward on an estate. And the last name Lewis comes from many different cultures so it has a few different meanings. Like, an English Lewis was the son of a Lowis. Lewis also developed various first names in France and Germany and Normandy and so on. Those with the last name Llewellyn, in Welsh, usually becomes Lewis' in English.

Young is likely to have been the English interpretation of German, Dutch, Chinese, Korean or French last names because all of them sounded similar to English people. So, basically, Young meant "other". And in Middle English it also developed as a surname for the youngest sons.

Weber is German, it meant someone was a weaver. And in English, King obviously means leader, but many people adopted it who weren't rulers. You'll notice, for instance, that the Queen of England is not named Elizabeth Queen. But the name became popular among American immigrants from Ireland and in the 16th century it

was also common to give orphans in France the last name Roi, meaning "king".

The etymology of Garcia isn't certain but most believe it came from a Basque word meaning "bear", or else "young bear". And Rodriguez means "son of Rodrigo", a name that itself means "rich in glory".

Then, finally, I return to my salon to tell you that Campbell is a combination of two Scottish-Gaelic words: "cam" means "crooked", and "bell" means "mouth". So Campbell equals "crooked mouth".

Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube - I can't even fake having a crooked mouth - which was brought to you, again, by our friends at Geico, and made with the help of all of these nice people. Don't forget to watch our other shows and, as we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.