

## MAIN TYPES OF INFORMAL PLACE NAMES IN THE USA: A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

*The article deals with the main motivational types of informal place names in the USA, namely: American state, city and town nicknames related to the history, geography, economy and demographic situation. The origin of many of them is quite evident due to their components denoting particular objects like animals, plants and natural phenomena, etc. in geographical monikers or manufactured goods in economic nicknames. On the other hand, there are a large number of alternative place names whose etymology needs in-depth research into the mechanisms of their formation.*

**Keywords:** *informal place name, nickname, onym, motivation, motivational type.*

**Зосимова О. В. Основные типы неофициальных топонимов США: мотивационный аспект.** *В данной статье рассматриваются основные мотивационные типы неофициальных топонимов США, а именно: прозвища американских штатов и городов, связанные с историей, географией, экономикой и особенностями демографической ситуации. Происхождение многих исследуемых онимов является вполне очевидным благодаря наличию в их составе непосредственных компонентов-идентификаторов, в частности названий животных, растений, природных явлений в «географических» топонимах-прозвищах или названий промышленных товаров – в «экономических». Вместе с тем, существует достаточно большое количество неофициальных топонимов США, мотивация которых не настолько прозрачна и требует детального анализа механизмов их формирования.*

**Ключевые слова:** *неофициальный топоним, прозвище, оним, мотивация, мотивационный тип.*

**Зосімова О. В. Основні типи неофіційних топонімів США: мотиваційний аспект.** *У статті розглянуто основні мотиваційні типи неофіційних топонімів США, а саме: прізвиська американських штатів та міст, пов'язані з історією, географією, економікою та особливостями демографічної ситуації. Кожен із чотирьох окреслених типів можна розподілити на певні підгрупи. Так, підґрунтям для створення «географічних» прізвиськ є площа, специфіка розташування певного міста чи штату, їхній рельєф, клімат, річки, озера та інші водойми, флора й фауна тощо. Мотивами номінації у сфері «демографічних» неофіційних топонімів передусім є етнічна, релігійна належність та соціальний статус мешканців певних населених пунктів чи інших адміністративних одиниць.*

*Походження багатьох досліджуваних онімів є цілком очевидним через наявність у їхньому складі безпосередніх компонентів-ідентифікаторів, зокрема назв тварин, рослин, природних явищ у «географічних» топонимах-прізвиськах або назв промислових товарів – в «економічних». Разом із тим, існує досить велика кількість неофіційних топонімів США, мотивація яких є не такою прозорою й потребує детального аналізу механізмів їхнього формування. Перспективним видається виокремлення та опис інших мотиваційних типів неофіційних топонімів США, зокрема прізвиськ, пов'язаних з архітектурою, історичними пам'ятками, культурою, освітою, а також видатними мешканцями певного штату чи міста.*

**Ключові слова:** *неофіційний топонім, прізвисько, онім, мотивація, мотиваційний тип.*

Most American cities and towns as well as all the states adopt titles, or alternative (informal) names, because “they can help in establishing a civic identity, help outsiders recognize a community or attract people to a community, promote civic pride, and build community unity” [16]. These informal names are often

recognized by the state or federal legislature, and become ‘official nicknames,’ appearing on license plates and sometimes even state flags, etc.

Being an integral part of American culture and an important element of the language onomastic system, alternative place names need comprehensive research. It should be emphasized that, in comparison with informal anthroponymy, place names are not thoroughly studied. As a rule, they are just mentioned or briefly characterized within the surveys of nicknames of a certain country or language community (see, e.g., works of O. Leonovich [2: 11-12], O. Tytarenko [3: 9], G. Tomakhin [4: 212], etc.). V. Kanna analyzes some US state and city nicknames in the context of the research of ‘connotative toponyms’ as a particular type of proper names [1: 12]. Some recent studies in the field of the US informal toponymy focus on the structure and derivation of the nicknames in question (see, e.g., O. Zosimova [17; 18]). Many English and American scholars compile dictionaries of alternate and secondary names, sobriquets and titles for geographical places, including explanations of the nicknames and one or more quotations documenting their use [8; 12]. However, as a linguistic phenomenon, American informal place names still need an in-depth analysis.

The motivation of the US state, city and town nicknames is remarkably diverse. This paper is aimed at identifying and describing the most popular motivational factors that determine the use of a particular informal place name.

**Historical** nicknames are connected with significant events in the history of particular cities, towns or states, e.g.: Delaware was the first state to ratify the Constitution of the United States, thereby becoming known as *The First State* [16]; *Equality State* (Wyoming) – because of the rights that women have traditionally enjoyed there (Wyoming women were the first in the nation to vote, serve on juries and hold public office) [14]; *The Cradle of the Confederacy* (Montgomery, Alabama) – due to the fact that during the Civil War Montgomery was the capital of the Confederate States of America [5]; the nicknames for Massachusetts – *Old Colony State* and *Pilgrim State* – refer to the original Plymouth colony (1620) and its first settlers – Pilgrim Fathers [14]; Nevada – *Battle Born State* (refers to the fact that Nevada joined the Union during the Civil War) [16]; Virginia – *The Cavalier State* (derived from the *Cavaliers*, supporters of King Charles I during the English Civil War, who left England and came to Virginia during, and shortly after, the reign of King Charles I of England [11]).

Quite often ‘historical’ background for the US city and state nicknames is less evident, and, at first sight, they can even seem quite bewildering. For example, the informal place name *The Blue Hen (Chicken) State* (Delaware) originated during the Revolutionary War. According to W.A. Powell’s *History of Delaware*, 1928, the story traces back to a Captain Caldwell from Kent County who carried with him a pair of fighting game cocks. These chickens, descendents of a famous Blue Hen, were well known in Kent County for their superior fighting qualities. It is said that upon seeing these game cocks fight, one soldier cried, “We’re sons of the Old Blue Hen and we’re game to the end,” comparing the fighting prowess of the chickens to the fighting prowess of the Delaware soldiers. These regiments from Kent County became known as “Blue Hen’s Chickens.” This name was soon applied state wide. In 1939, the Blue Hen Chicken was adopted as Delaware’s official State Bird [11].

The nickname for Texas, *The Lone Star State*, comes from the symbolism of the star on the 1836 flag of the republic, the “National Standard of Texas.” The single golden star on a blue background signified Texas as an independent republic and was a reminder of the state’s struggle for independence from Mexico [11].

Arizona is called *Baby State* because it is the newest continental state in the Union [16] (cf.: the last state to enter the US, Hawaii is sometimes referred to as *The Youngest State*).

Salem, Massachusetts got its official nickname *The Witch City* due to the notorious Salem witch trials, a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts (1692 – 1693) [16].

Many nicknames in question are **geographical**. It means that they are motivated by the geographical position (Rugby – *Geographical Center of North America*, Berlin – *Geographic Center of Connecticut*, Florida – *Peninsula State*, Alameda – *The Island City*), area (Rhode Island – *The Smallest State* and *Little Rhody*, Omer – *Michigan’s Smallest City*), boundaries (West Virginia – *The Panhandle State*; the borders of West Virginia tend to follow the contours of the land, winding between mountains, along mountain ridges, and along river beds; two long, slender extensions of the state give West Virginia this nickname [11]), terrain, or land relief (Colorado – *The Highest State*; this nickname is in reference to Colorado as the state with the highest average elevation and its towering mountains; West Virginia – *The Mountain State*; the nickname refers to the rugged terrain of the scenic Allegheny Mountains that cross the state [11]), rivers and lakes (Little Rock – *River City*, Warsaw – *Lake City*, Amery – *City of Lakes*, Minnesota – *Land of 10,000 Lakes*), climate (San Francisco – *Fog City*, Hilo, Hawaii – *America’s Wettest City*, Tampa – *Lightning Capital of the World*, Florida – *The Sunshine State* and *Hurricane State*, Texas – *The Blizzard State*, Cut Bank – *Coldest Spot in the Nation*), fauna (Louisiana – *The Pelican State*, Florida – *The Alligator State*, Marysville – *Black Squirrel Capital*, Crawford – *Deer Capital of Nebraska*, Rayne – *Frog Capital of the World*, Coconut Creek – *Butterfly Capital of the World*) and flora (Mississippi – *The Magnolia State*, Florida – *The Orange State*, New Mexico – *The Cactus State*, Atlanta – *City of Trees*, Rochester – *Lilac City*, Vineland – *Dandelion Capital of the World*) of a particular state, city or town.

Different features of physical geography can be expressed either directly through the names of landforms, natural phenomena, animals and plants etc., or less explicitly, with the help of various figurative expressions like *Shaky Town* (an informal name of Los Angeles (shared with San Francisco) that refers to quite frequent earthquakes), *Icebox of the Nation* (Pellston is the coldest place in Michigan and one of the coldest in the USA), *Soup Town* (a nickname for Superior – because of common fog overhangs; also due to the similarity with the city’s official name) [16]. In 1882, P.T. Barnum brought the largest African elephant ever kept in captivity from London to the United States to be used in his circus. The elephant’s name was Jumbo. The elephant came to signify anything that was unusually large. Texas, the largest state in the Union, became known as *The Jumbo State* at that time [11].

The nationality, social status or religious beliefs of their inhabitants earned American states, cities and towns such **demographic** nicknames as *Iowa’s Irish Capital* (Emmetsburg), *Danish capital of America* (Solvang), *The Creole State*

(Louisiana), *The Apache State* and *The Aztec State* (Arizona); *City of Millionaires* (Colorado Springs), *Home of the Homeless* (Santa Monica); *Quaker City* (Philadelphia), Utah – *Mormon State* (after the first settlers in the territory; members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [11]), etc. The nickname for Jefferson, *The Gemuetlichkeit City*, also has an ethnic background. Gemuetlichkeit is a German word for hospitality. A festival by that name was begun in 1971 to honour Jefferson's German heritage. Since that time the name Gemuetlichkeit has been associated with Jefferson [10: 43].

A great number of informal place names characterize the US states, cities and towns as centres of a particular industry or business, e.g.: Tulsa – *Oil Capital of the World*, Wilmington – *Chemical Capital of the World*, Michigan – *The World's Motor Capital*, Seaford – *The Nylon Capital of the World*, Amsterdam – *The Carpet City*, Sacramento – *Big Tomato*, Yuba City – *Prune Capital*, Hartford – *Insurance City*, Louisiana – *The Sugar State*, Minnesota – *Butter Country*, Delaware – *The Corporate Capital* (many corporations have incorporated in the state because of its business-friendly law [11]). Bill Ryan points out that the nicknames associated with industries which once brought fame to cities and towns live on even if these “industries declined, went out of business altogether, or simply went South for cheaper labor and more sun” [13]. Consequently, Waterbury is still the *Brass City* even though the huge Scovill plant has been vacant for years. Naugatuck is the *Rubber City* although rubber is no longer processed there [13]. Peoria continues to be referred to as *Whiskey Town* because it was once the whiskey capital of the country, producing more whiskey than any other city in history, and contributing the most to the federal government's whiskey tax than any other city. The last Peoria brewery closed in 2000, but the legacy of Peoria's great history of whiskey still remains [6]. Even if a town doesn't technically exist anymore its community still tries to preserve its identity along with the nickname. For example, Willimantic is still known as the *Thread City* (because of the American Thread Company, which dominated the town's economic life for most of the 20th century), though in the 1980s the thread mills were closed and Willimantic was consolidated into the city of Windham, legally and officially [13].

In fact, any product or business activity can provide a basis for **economic** nicknames. They can be quite traditional manufactured goods like automobiles (Detroit – *The Motor City*, Elkhart – *RV Capital of the World*, Allentown – *Truck Capital of the World*), equipment and instruments (Electra – *Pump Jack Capital of Texas*, Albertville – *Fire Hydrant Capital of the World*, Bristol – *Clock City*), furniture (Gardner – *Chair City*, High Point and Grand Rapids – *Furniture City*), fabrics (Manchester – *Silk City*), clothes and footwear (Danbury – *Hat City*, Olathe – *Cowboy Boot Capital*), stationery (Shelbyville – *Pencil City*, Fort Madison – *Pen City*), hardware (New Britain – *Hardware City*), etc. On the other hand, many American cities and towns are proud of producing rather special items: from natural sponges (Tarpon Springs) and condoms (Dothan) to Ferris wheels (Jacksonville) and barbed wire (DeKalb). In our opinion, the list of self-proclaimed world capitals of ‘the mundane and the bizarre’ [9] also includes such pieces of clothing as socks (Fort Payne), underwear (Knoxville) and earmuffs (Farmington). Troy, NY is known as *The Collar City* due to the invention of the detachable collar. According

to H. Faber, back in 1820, Orlando Montague, a blacksmith, complained to his wife that he did not have a clean white shirt in the evening when he came home from work. Mrs. Montague solved the problem by cutting collars off her husband's shirts, providing a clean one for him to wear whenever he wanted [7].

The wide range of fruits that gave nicknames to American states, cities and towns is also quite impressive: they are peaches (Delaware – *The Peach State*), pineapples (Hawaii – *The Pineapple State*), strawberries (Marysville – *The Strawberry City*), watermelons (Cordele – *Watermelon Capital of the World*), kiwi fruit (Gridley – *Kiwi Fruit Capital of the World*), etc. 'Vegetable-related' monikers include names of diverse species they vary from wide-spread food crops like wheat, rice and potatoes etc. to any cultivated edible plants such as carrots, pumpkins, artichokes, onions, garlic, broccoli, spinach, asparagus, lettuce, chili pepper and many others. A lot of food products also provide a basis for the US state, city and town nicknames, e.g.: Hershey – *Chocolate Town*, Elgin – *Sausage Capital of Texas*, Marion – *World's Popcorn Capital*, Elsie – *Michigan's Dairy Capital*, Wisconsin – *America's Dairyland* and *The Cheese State*, Nebraska – *The Beef State*, Ellsworth – *Cheese Curd Capital of Wisconsin*, Freeport – *Pretzel City*, Le Mars – *Ice Cream Capital of the World*, Calabash – *Seafood Capital of the World* etc. Battle Creek, known as the *Cereal City*, is the world headquarters of Kellogg Company, founded by Will Keith Kellogg in 1906, whose brother, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, invented cold breakfast cereal as an alternative to the traditional meat-based breakfast [16]. The cereal industry also earned Battle Creek two other nicknames – *Cereal Bowl of the World* and *Breakfast Capital of the World*.

Among economic nicknames we can single out a particular group of onyms that are based on the type of energy sources characteristic of different towns or cities. Nowadays many of them are proud of using alternative sources, e.g.: Willits – *Solar Energy Capital of the World*, McCamey – *Wind Energy Capital of Texas*, Lake Benton – *Windpower Capital* (according to the information provided by the city official website, "600 plus wind turbines grace the skyline along the Buffalo Ridge, bringing clean, renewable energy to the forefront" [15]).

The results of our research into the motivation of American state, city and town nicknames enable us to draw some general conclusions. The most productive types of informal place names under discussion include historical, geographical, demographic and economic nicknames. The origin of many of them is quite evident due to their components denoting particular objects like animals, plants and natural phenomena, etc. in geographical monikers or manufactured goods in economic nicknames. On the other hand, there are a large number of metaphorical alternative place names whose etymology needs in-depth research into the mechanisms of their formation.

The prospects for our study can be seen in singling out and describing other motivational types of nicknames in question, namely informal place names related to the architecture, historic monuments, culture, education, sports, as well as notable inhabitants of a particular state, city or town, etc. A further detailed analysis of the US informal place names' motivation seems promising both in the field of onomastics and country studies aimed at broadening our knowledge of American history, economics, politics, culture and traditions.

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