

2014 Name of the Year Award

CLEVELAND EVANS

Bellevue University, Nebraska, USA

The tenth annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in Portland, Oregon on January 9 2015.

For 2014 we had twenty-six total nominees, four more than for 2013, but four fewer than for 2012. Twenty nominations were made by email before the meeting, and seven were nominated from the floor.

There were eight nominations for Trade Name of the Year. Four were not commercial names, but names of entities in the news that did not fit well in other categories.

The first of these was Islamic State/ISIS/ISIL, the fundamentalist military government which took over parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014. This was of onomastic interest both because of the uncertainty as to which of the three forms of the name was “correct,” and also because at least one commercial company called Isis changed its name to Softcard during the year to avoid the bad publicity associated with the violent political group.

Another non-commercial name in the category was Ebola, the name of the deadly virus which caused a widespread epidemic in three West African countries during 2014. Several Americans infected with the virus were flown to the United States for treatment, which increased public awareness and concern. The virus itself was named after a river in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Heartbleed was another kind of virus: a security bug discovered in April 2014 which allows encrypted information to be stolen from computer systems. Heartbleed, the first computer virus to have its own logo and website, was called “evocative” by its nominator.

The final non-commercial trade name nominee was more positive: Philae, the name of the exploratory craft which landed on Comet 67P in April. Philae is named after an Egyptian obelisk whose inscriptions in both Greek and Egyptian hieroglyphs helped scientists decipher hieroglyphs — just as they hope Philae will help them understand comets. The spacecraft which traveled to the comet and then launched Philae was called Rosetta, after the Rosetta stone, another ancient artifact which helped the deciphering of hieroglyphs.

The four truly commercial names in the Trade Name category began with Malaysia Airlines, the air carrier which had the misfortune to have Flight 370 disappear over the Indian Ocean on March 8 and Flight 17 shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17.

Hobby Lobby is a family owned corporation much in the news in 2014 because of a Supreme Court ruling which decided that “closely held” companies like Hobby Lobby do not have to provide birth control coverage as part of employee health insurance.

Uber is a smart phone app-based transportation network and taxi company which created controversy in 2014 because of complaints that it avoided licensing and safety regulations and so was an unfair competitor to other taxi firms. Its success spawned many imitators, and in parts of California “to uber” now means to arrange any kind of delivery through a mobile app.

Nominated from the floor at the meeting was Spotify, the name of a commercial music-streaming service which had 60 million users by the end of 2014.

Uber won Trade Name of the Year with 65 percent of the votes.

There were five nominees for Place Name of the Year. After the Trade Names vote, both Islamic State and Ebola were nominated from the floor in the Place Name category.

The three place names nominated before the meeting include Novorossia, a nineteenth-century term for the land forming the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine. The name was revived in 2014 by separatists there and was taken over by many in the Western media.

Sochi, the Russian Black Sea resort city where the Winter Olympics were held in 2014, was the center of controversy when some called for a boycott of the games because of anti-gay legislation in Russia.

Ferguson, the suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, which was in the news because of nationwide protests following the shooting of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by a policeman on August 9, was the final Place Name nominee. Ferguson, a place few Americans were aware of before this year, now immediately evokes many associations dealing with racial injustice, similar to Selma and Watts.

Ferguson won Place Name of the year with 79 percent of the votes.

Five nominations for Personal Name of the Year were received by email. These included Michael Brown, the name of the man shot to death in Ferguson, and Ray Rice, the Baltimore Ravens football player who was the center of controversy over domestic violence in the sport after a video of him assaulting his then-fiancée went viral.

Also nominated were Robin Williams, the actor whose suicide on August 11 became one of the most discussed stories on social media in 2014; and Mo'ne Davis, the eleven-year-old Philadelphian who became the first girl to earn a win and pitch a shutout in Little League World Series history.

Josh Earnest, the White House Press Secretary since May 30 2014, was nominated because many find his name humorous for someone with his job.

Nominees from the floor included Meryl Davis, who with her partner Charlie White became the first Americans to win an Olympic gold medal in ice dancing, and Lupita Nyong'o, the Mexican-born Kenyan actress who won the Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her performance as Patsey in “Twelve Years A Slave.”

Khaleesi, the title of a character in the “A Song of Ice and Fire” fantasy novels by George R. R. Martin and the HBO television series based on them, was nominated as a personal name because of how this title has become well used as a baby name in the United States since the series began, with viewers evidently thinking it is the character's name because she is addressed by the title. Khaleesi means “wife of the warlord” in Martin's invented Dothraki language. The character's name is Daenerys.

Malala was nominated from the floor in honor of Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai. In 2014 she was the youngest winner ever of the Nobel Peace Prize. Her courageous

advocacy for girls' education despite being shot by the Taliban spawned the world-wide "I am Malala" movement promoting universal education for all children.

Malala won as Personal Name of the Year on the first ballot with 61 percent of the votes, with most of the other votes going to Josh Earnest. (Malala was also the Personal Name of the Year for 2012.)

After losing for Personal Name, Khaleesi was again nominated from the floor for Fictional Name of the Year. Five nominees for Fictional Name were received before the meeting.

Two nominees were movie titles: "Unbroken," a film directed by Angelina Jolie about the World War II prison camp experiences of Olympic distance runner Louis Zamperini; and "The Interview," a satirical film about an assassination of the president of North Korea which was the center of controversy when Sony Pictures first cancelled its opening because of threats by North Korea, and then released it any way after many protested this as a violation of "free speech."

Elsa, the heroine of the Disney animated film "Frozen," was nominated because, while the film was released in November of 2013, the character grew in prominence during 2014 as the movie became the highest-grossing animated film in history. The character was also touted as a nontraditional and more feminist role model for young girls. The name Elsa greatly increased during 2014 as a baby name in both the United States and the United Kingdom as a result.

Hazel Grace Lancaster, the name of the heroine of "The Fault in Our Stars," a 2014 film based on a book by John Green, was nominated as a good example of how fictional characters often receive names which have become newly popular for babies, even though the character is "too old" for the name. The fame of the character then creates a "feedback loop" making the name even more popular.

Finally, Slender Man, a sinister Internet-created horror character, was nominated because teenagers arrested for assault in both Wisconsin and Florida in 2014 claimed to be imitating Slender Man.

Elsa was voted Fictional Name of the Year with 71 percent of the vote. Most of the other votes went to "The Interview."

The four winners in the overall categories automatically became nominees for overall Name of the Year. This year there were no other nominations from the floor. Ferguson was chosen as overall Name of the Year for 2014, earning twenty votes, to five for Malala and one each for Uber and Elsa.

For 2015, the American Name Society will again vote on Names of the Year in the four categories of Fictional Names, Place Names, Personal Names, and Trade Names before choosing an overall winner. Send nominations to Dr. Cleveland Evans, either by email at cleveland.evans@bellevue.edu, or by postal mail to him at Psychology Department, Bellevue University, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, NE 68005-3098, USA. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which will be included on the list of nominees presented at our annual meeting during January 2016.