

REPORT

Name of the Year 2019

CLEVE EVANS

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The thirteenth annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in New Orleans, on January 3, 2020. For 2019, we had in total twenty-three nominees, three less than for 2018. Eighteen nominations came in by email before the meeting, and five were nominated from the floor.

There were two nominations for Trade Name of the Year. *Dow Jones* was nominated because of the large number of record highs and frequent large swings in value that the Wall Street stock market index experienced during 2019. *TikTok* is a video sharing social network service owned by ByteDance, a Beijing-based company. Launched outside of China in 2017, the TikTok app achieved one billion global downloads in February 2019. Its nominator pointed out that TikTok is the first Chinese-made app to succeed on a massive scale outside of China. The name was created from *tick-tock*, onomatopoeia for the sound made by mechanical clocks, which has become a term for countdowns and minute-by-minute action. Discussion before the vote pointed out that end-of-the-year reviews in news magazines prominently featured TikTok's success. *TikTok* won as Trade Name of the Year unanimously on the first ballot.

There were three different email nominees for Place Name of the Year, though two were similar. The pair *Russia and Ukraine* and the single name *Ukraine* were both nominated because of their prominence in the impeachment hearings during which President Trump was accused of attempting to coerce Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his son, Hunter. The heavy news coverage of this story informed US Americans that the modern name of the country is now *Ukraine*, not *The Ukraine*.

The third place name, *Arrokoth*, also received an advance nomination. This is the name given in November 2019 to a distant Kuiper belt body—a billion miles beyond Pluto—formerly known as *minor planet 486958*. Before the *New Horizons* probe flew over it on January 1, 2019, NASA received about 34,000 name suggestions. The initial selection was *Ultima Thule* which literally means 'farthest Thule.' *Thule* was the farthest north location mentioned in ancient Greek and Roman cartography. This initial suggestion didn't stick because *Ultima Thule* was the name given by Nazi occultists to the mythical homeland

of the “Aryan race.” *Arrokoth* means ‘sky’ in Powhatan, an extinct Eastern Algonquian language formerly spoken in Virginia.

In addition to three advanced nominations listed above, another toponym was suggested during the ANS deliberations. The fourth place name nominated from the floor was *Kyiv*. The modern romanization of the name of the Ukrainian capital, *Kyiv* is now in the process of replacing the former *Kiev* in English-speaking countries. Despite this explanation, *Kyiv* did not rank high in the election. In the initial vote, *Ukraine* and *Arrokoth* tied. In a runoff between them, *Arrokoth* became Place Name of the Year with 63% of the votes.

Six nominations for Personal Name of the Year were received by email. Three were nicknames from the realm of US American politics. *Pencil Neck*, a nickname for Congressman Adam Schiff, Chair of the House Committee on Intelligence. This name was nominated for how it was widely used in conservative news media, appearing in cartoons and on T-shirts. *AOC*, the initialism now widely used for U. S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, was nominated because of the novelty of such a form being used for a woman politician, though male politicians have been referred to by nicknames such as *FDR*, *JFK*, and *LBJ*. *The Whistleblower* was also nominated for how the word for anyone who calls attention to wrongdoing has become a nickname for the anonymous person who wrote a formal report alleging several acts of inappropriate and potentially criminal behavior within the Trump Administration.

Karen was nominated for how it’s being used as a mocking slur against Generation X white women thought to be insensitive, self-absorbed, racist, and/or heterosexist. Its onomastic relevance comes partly from the fact that in the United States, *Karen* peaked in popularity not during Gen X but during the height of the Baby Boom years.

Another nomination was for *Kavosiey Smoke*, the name of a running back for the University of Kentucky whose home is Wetumpka, Alabama was nominated for how it prompts frequent comments from announcers and sportswriters. The nominator pointed out Mr. Smoke was named about the time actor Tim Meadows starred in the 2000 film “The Ladies Man.” This film showcased his Saturday Night Live character *Leon Phelps*, whose comic attempts to seduce women usually included a bottle of Courvoisier brand cognac. Also nominated was *Juice WRLD*, the stage name of Jarad Anthony Higgins, a rap singer and songwriter from Chicago who died December 8, 2019. Higgins created the name by combining the title of the 1992 crime thriller film “Juice” with WRLD, representing his desire to take over the entertainment world.

Nominated from the floor were *Boomer*, a nickname for persons of the Baby Boom generation, and *Greta Thunberg*. A Swedish activist, Thunberg turned 17 January 3, 2020, and has been leading a global youth movement addressing climate change. Chosen by “Time” magazine as Person of the Year for 2019, her name’s become a byword for youth climate activists. Their influence on politics is called “The Greta Effect.” A documentary film about the movement is titled

“Make the World Greta Again.” The nominator pointed out that the full name also reminds some English-speakers of the phrase “Great Thunderbird” and so is coincidentally apropos for the famous activist. *Greta Thunberg* won the title of Personal Name of the Year with 65% of the votes on the initial ballot.

There were two email nominees for Artistic and Literary Name of the year, *Billie Eilish* and *Baby Yoda*. *Billie Eilish* is the stage name of the singer and songwriter whose full name is *Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O’Connell*. The nominator gave the following justification:

This choice is intriguing as the name *Billie* was once primarily marked as male in the United States. [...] The popularity of this award-winning singer has not only helped to increase non-Gaelic speakers’ familiarity with how to pronounce the name *Eilish* (eye-lish). It will also most likely help to push the popularity of one or more of her names for female children born in 2020. The story of this artist’s name is a testament to the importance of personal naming in celebrating diversity.

There were also strong arguments offered for the second email nominee. *Baby Yoda* is the popular designation for a character in the Disney Plus Star Wars series “The Mandalorian.” In the film, this recurring character with saucer eyes and bat-like ears is known simply as *The Child*. However, viewers and critics quickly dubbed him *Baby Yoda*. The character is almost always called this alternative name on social media. It’s unusual for the common name of a fictional character that was created by fans to replace the official name originally given by writers or producers. Along with these nominations for real and fictional figures in US popular media, a third onomastic contender was suggested for this category. *The Overstory* is the title of Richard Powers’ bestselling Pulitzer prize winning novel. In this popular work, the environmental activist characters have a near-mystical relationship with trees. *The Overstory* was nominated from the floor. After careful deliberation, *Baby Yoda* won as Artistic and Literary Name on the first ballot with 84% of the vote.

This was the first year an E-name of the Year was selected. There was only one nominee, *#Fridaysforfuture*. This hashtag names Greta Thunberg’s movement and refers to her original habit of protesting on Fridays in front of the Swedish Parliament instead of going to school. It’s spawned many other e-names, and also names outside of virtual reality for analogous protest groups (*Scientists for Future*, *Parents for Future*, *All for Future*). Voters unanimously ratified *#Fridaysforfuture* as the E-name of the Year.

There were four email nominees for Miscellaneous Name of the Year. The first was *Conception*, the name of a California dive boat which sank after a fire in September off the Channel Islands, leading to the worst maritime disaster in California in more than 150 years. The second nominee was *Varsity Blues*, the name of the FBI investigation into a criminal conspiracy to influence college-admissions officers at several elite colleges. The name was much in the news because several celebrities were among those charged. The name may have been inspired by *Varsity Blues*, the title of a 1999 sports-comedy film. The third

nominee was *Green New Deal*, legislation proposed by House Democrats that would mitigate the effects of human-caused climate change. It was named as homage to FDR's *New Deal* and inspired Democratic candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren's *Blue New Deal for Our Cceans*. The final Miscellaneous nominee was *Antivax(x)er*. Antivaxers are adults reluctant to receive or allow their children to be given medical vaccination. Although Merriam Webster says *Antivaxer* first was attested in English in 2009, the name reached prominence in 2019, when health experts worldwide became alarmed by the re-emergence of many contagious diseases. The highest rate of Google searches ever reached for *Antivax(x)er* came in April 2019. Finally, *Brexit*, the still much in the news name for the United Kingdom's 2016 decision to leave the European Union, was nominated from the floor. Amongst these options, *Antivax(x)er* won as Miscellaneous Name of the Year with 65% of the vote.

The six category winners became the nominees for overall Name of the Year for 2019. *Kyiv* and *Trumptard* were also nominated from the floor for this honor. *Arrokoth* and *Baby Yoda* received the most votes in the first round, with *Arrokoth* triumphing with 78% in the runoff. At the end of this round of voting, the attendees of the ANS meeting took on another task. Inspired by the American Dialect Society's vote for Word of the Decade, the ANS voters spontaneously decided to designate a Name of the Decade for 2010-2019. The ten yearly winners that decade (*Jamal Khashoggi*, *Rohingya*, *Aleppo*, *Caitlin Jenner*, *Ferguson*, *Francis*, *Sandy*, *Arab Spring*, *Eyjafjallajökull*, and *Arrokoth*) were automatically nominated. *Brexit* and *Antivax(x)er* also received floor nominations. During the discussion, it was pointed out that *Brexit* had stayed prominent for several years and spawned many other names such as *Grexit*, *Calexit*, *Texit*, and *Brexicon*. In a runoff against *Arab Spring*, *Brexit* won the title of Name of the Decade with 65% of the votes cast.

For 2020, the American Name Society will vote on Names of the Year in the six categories of Artistic and Literary Names, Place Names, Personal Names, Trade Names, E-names, and Miscellaneous Names before choosing an over-all winner. Send nominations to Deborah Walker by email at debwalk@gmail.com. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which will be included on the list of nominees presented at our annual meeting in San Francisco during January 2021.