

A family name can tell us a great deal about a person. The fact that one of your ancestors in the distant past was named John and thus your family name is Johnson would seem of little moment. However we could don Sherlock Holmes (mythical) deerstalker and infer quite a lot from such an innocuous clue. John is an English name and as the majority of English family names or surnames were applied in the late Middle Ages we can be fairly certain that it comes from Medieval English stock. This type of family name is term a patronymic and, oddly enough, accounts for six (seven including Washington) of the first ten U.S. Presidents; Adams, Jefferson - son of Geoffrey, Madison - son of Maud, Adams, Harrison, and Jackson. Washington's family originated in Washington, the settlement of '*Wassa*', in north-east England, and is therefore technically a patronymic. Monroe's family once lived at the mouth of a river in Scotland. John Tyler probably came from a family of roofer's, Tyler is an occupational name like Slater. The exception, Van Buren, was of poor Dutch heritage with the equivalent English name of Cotter, or a tenant farmer who lived in a cottage. Madison is actually a matronymic, a descendant of a matriarch. Other examples of this are Molson, from Moll or Mary; Emmett, from Emma; Marriot, from Mary; and Tillotson, from a nickname for Matilda.

Patronymics are common throughout the western world. Almost invariably a name ending in '*-ian*' indicates an Armenian from the Parthian word for son of. Mac as a prefix, as in MacDonald, MacDougal, MacDuff, is the Scots Gaelic for son of while the Irish foreshortened it to O' or of, as in O'Reilly, O'Donnell etc. Another similar Irish variant is KilPatrick, or KilBride, meaning of Patrick or Bridget. The prefix Fitz, FitzHerbert for example, denotes the descendant of a 'natural son' or child born out of wedlock. Maud, who fought a civil war for the throne of England in the 12th century, referred to her son, King Henry II, as Henry FitzEmpress as she had once been married to the Holy Roman Emperor. Anybody with the prefix Fitz- probably has some noble blood as the peasants rarely bothered with the primarily legal distinction of marriage.

Slavic countries regularly use patronymics, in Bulgaria and the Ukraine and Russia *-ov* is appended to the name either as Ivanov (male) Ivanova (female) or Ivanovi (family/tribe). There is a defining grammar to these names, for example, Petrovski would be son of and descendant of Peter. The family name Salomonova would indicate a female Russian Jew, a descendant of the tribe of Solomon, just as Salomon Brothers was the Anglicized surname. In Russia, giving your full name is like handing over a small family tree!

Staying in Eastern Europe, the Greek surname ending in *iou* is most likely a patronymic. Sometimes the name may be occupational as well, Papageorgiou would be the son of a priest named George. Papa- denotes priest, Archi- denotes a leader while Mastro was a merchant. Just like English names such as Short or Brown, the Greeks may precede their patronymic with a description such as Chodro, fat, or Palaio, wise. Italians, who incidentally claim to have the most surnames of any country in the world, 350,000 at the last count, predominantly have patronymics using 'of', Carlo di Marco, or Eduardo de Filippo. Interestingly, Ferrari, as in the company producing the wonderful hand-made cars, means Smith in Italian, so the skills were obviously handed down. The most common Italian name, Rossi (or Russo) means red, a very distinctive hair coloring in Italy.

In general Jewish family names were foisted upon the people to enable the authorities to keep accurate civic records. Owing to the general European Anti-Semitism of those times Jews adopted occupational names in the local language, making them indistinguishable from the surrounding population; the preponderance of Jews in what is now Germany, Austria and Poland resulted in many occurrences of Schmidt for Smith, and Müller, or Mueller for Miller. Quite often the authorities gave them names to mark them, Benjamin D'Israeli, the famous British Prime-Minister was descended from 'people of the tribe of Israel'. Similarly the surname Levi denotes of the tribe of Levy, a form of patronymic. Cohen or Kohn do derive from Hebrew, being the word for priest, but are generally applied to descendants of Aaron.

German names took much the same course as English, occupational names are common, Muller,

Schmidt, etc., as were descriptive names. Because of the many Jewish settlers in German speaking states Klein is thought to be Jewish whereas it simply means short. Schwartzkopf means black head and refers to the hair, in English this would be Mr. Black. Von, correctly speaking, is only used by people claiming German nobility but people were often known by a nearby landmark; Rosenblum would be the rose-garden and Engels, far from denoting a heavenly prodigy, more likely referred to an inn called the Angel. Patronymics could infer religion, Mendel was a Jewish given name whereas Fredericks or Heinrickson were more likely German Protestant.

Thus a name can tell us a great deal about a person, or at least their ancestors, DuPont were French Huguenots originally living near the bridge; Bayer, on the other hand came from Bavaria. Often you have to look carefully at a name as most of our ancestors were illiterate. Shakespeare is spelled at least 21 different ways (more if you include William) and *probably* means a belligerent person, although it could be a bawdy term for a womanizer. David Jansen probably has Dutch antecedents, Jan being the variant of John.