



America in So Many Words: Words That Have Shaped America

By Allan Metcalf, David K. Barnhart

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America in So Many Words presents a unique and fascinating historical view of this country's language. It chronicles, year by year, the contributions we have made to the vocabulary of English and the words we have embraced as the nation has evolved. From canoe (1555), and corn (1608), to newbie (1993), and Ebonics (1997), a prominent word for nearly every year in the history of our nation is analyzed and discussed in its historical context. The result is an engaging survey of American linguistic culture through the centuries. The authors - both lifelong students of American English - bring a great depth of understanding to the words that have made the nation and the language what they are today.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Did you know that the word "juke" (as in "jukebox") comes from the West African language Wolof and means "to make mischief"? Or that the slang expression "bogus" reaches as far back as 1797, when it signified a counterfeit coin? Like the country from which it emerged, American English is a vital multicultural stew of sources and influences. Word by word and year by year, *America in So Many Words* traces the origins and historical context of America's distinctive additions to the English language, from "canoe" (1555) all the way to "Ebonics" (1997). "O.K.," for instance, appeared in 1838 as part of a Boston fad for abbreviations--in this case, the humorously misspelled "all correct." "Rock and roll," America's equally famous contribution to the world lexicon, was first popularized in 1951 by disc jockey Alan Freed--his way to sidestep a prohibition against playing African American music for white audiences. A fascinating reference you'll read from cover to cover, *America in So Many Words* beautifully illustrates the ways in which history and vocabulary converge.

From Library Journal

From skunk and canoe in the 16th century to virtual reality and soccer mom in the late 20th century, this year-by-year review highlights words that have had an indelible American origin or meaning. Barnhart and Metcalf, two longtime lexicographers, have selected one particularly significant word for each year and, through anecdotes and historical details, discuss its roots, development, and importance. In 1864, for example, a deadline was an actual line drawn in the dirt to restrict Civil War prisoners ("If you cross this line, you're dead"). The 1891 term country club is juxtaposed with sweatshop in 1892 and connected by the apt little poem: "The golf links lie so near the mill/ That almost every day/ The laboring children can look out/ And see the men at play." Teenager appeared in 1938, followed by DJs, rock'n'roll, and fast food in the 1950s. This entertaining cultural history is recommended for general collections.?Ilse Heidmann, San Marcos, Tex.

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From Booklist

This highly selective etymological dictionary of more than 300 of "the best and the brightest" American words was compiled by two longtime students of American English--Barnhart, a lexicographer, and Metcalf, a college professor of English. Arrangement is chronological. The words chosen--a representative one for selected years from 1555 (*canoe*) to 1748 (*buck*), and one for each year from 1750 to 1998--are discussed in historical context, sometimes updated with contemporary quotations and with additional words similar to or connected to the key word or phrase. For example, the entry *sexism and ageism* (1969) mentions other *-isms*, and *Watergate* (1972) mentions other *-gate* terms. Black-and-white illustrations accompany some entries. The introduction has a note on sources, which include titles such as *The Dictionary of American Regional English*, *The Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, and the periodical *Barnhart Dictionary Companion*, as well as standard English-language dictionaries.

The entries are organized into six chapters, from "The English in America: 1497^1750" to "Nearing the Millennium: 1945^1998." Words are assigned to the year in which they were "newly coined or newly prominent." Entries range in length from half a page to just over a whole page. Some examples of entries from the first chapter are *turkey* (1607), *New England* (1616), *public school* (1636), and *ice cream* (1744). The concluding chapter features *rock and roll* (1951), *fast food* (1954), *soccer mom* (1996), *Ebonics* (1997), and *millennium bug* (1998). An index by word brings together all keywords and words discussed in the text,

and an index by date lists each year from 1555 and its keyword.

Most of the words and phrases found here also appear in other dictionaries of American English, but this book puts a new spin on their definitions. It should appeal to both browsers and reference personnel in high-school, public, and academic libraries. It supplements more scholarly works, such as those listed in the source notes in the introduction.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kim Duncan:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book titled America in So Many Words: Words That Have Shaped America? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can better than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

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The particular book America in So Many Words: Words That Have Shaped America has a lot details on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was written by the very famous author. The writer makes some research just before write this book. This particular book very easy to read you will get the point easily after reading this book.

Harvey Lee:

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