



The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins: Definitions and Origins of More Than 12,500 Words and Expressions (Facts on File Writer's Library)

By Robert Hendrickson



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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up—This volume features more than 15,000 quirky words and expressions (2500 of them added since the 2004 edition) from the English/American vernacular. The text, arranged alphabetically, covers a broad range of slang terms, acronyms, coined phrases, literary references, and other dialectical gems. Written in an often-humorous tone, the brief entries consist of etymology and examples of usage culled from sources such as Shakespearean plays, films, or famous declarations. Terms range from classical nicknames (Heraclitus's "The Weeping Philosopher") to pop-culture references (the *Seinfeld*-ism "man hands"). Foreign expressions such as the British-born "do the needful" and the timely Iraqi "I throw a shoe at you!" are explained. Cross-references are provided, and the index includes listings of phrases and the subjects who uttered them. As the preface states, "No word or phrase has been eliminated because it might offend someone's sensibilities." Hendrickson admits that some origins presented are mere theories. Moreover, the lack of a pronunciation guide and the volume's anecdotal approach undermine its academic value. Still, the author provides an entertaining, informative look at the diversity of influences on the English language. Readers will find plenty to pique their interest in this strong secondary source.—*Christina Connolly, Clark University, Worcester, MA*

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From Library Journal

This is a collection of stories, speculative though entertaining, behind 7500 English words and phrases, from A & P through babushka, Calvinism, Davy Crockett, eggs Benedict, fifty-four forty or fight, German measles, and many more to ZZZ. The stories are fascinating, but the book is marred by many misspellings, particularly in the quotations from German. Still, it will appeal to word buffs and hence should be of interest to public libraries. Scholars will probably continue to rely on the OED and other standard reference works.

Catherine von Schon, SUNY at Stony Brook

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From [Booklist](#)

This is a unique dictionary that focuses on the origins of words and expressions in North American English not usually addressed in standard dictionaries. The definitions are filled with humor, when appropriate, as well as colorful examples. The new edition contains more than 15,000 entries—up from 12,500 in the third (2003) edition—arranged in two columns per page. Users will learn how expressions such as blog, easy as taking candy from a baby, Spanglish, State of the Union message, and X rated came into use. Explanations range from a few short sentences to several paragraph and include the history of the word or phrase, how it is used, and who may have originated it. Terms range from the very current IED to those that are not much heard in contemporary times (mackintosh, for example) to the almost overused political correctness. There are entries for words derived from other languages, coined words, words from the names of people and places, and more. An index at the back of the book is especially useful for identifying terms attributed to particular people. Not only practical but entertaining as well, this work would complement any standard dictionary. It would prove useful in most libraries—particularly public and undergraduate libraries. Teacher-librarians will want to note that it includes entries for four-letter swear words—as well as many colorful variations, epithets, and phrases using swear words and their origins.

Users Review

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