What’s In A Name?
The Power of Street Names
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A Short History
Zoning Practice Research

› Importance of Street Naming & Addressing Systems
› A Short History of Street Naming & Addressing in the U.S.
› Implementing a Comprehensive System for Local Governments
› How to rename streets?
Why Do We Name Streets?

Prior to 18th Century, navigation & orientation was very local:

- House names
- Prominent landowners
- Meeting House / Market Place (e.g., Horse market; Hay market; New Street)
- Inn, Business, Trade or Craft (e.g., glasswork; ironwork; tailor)
- Landmark (e.g., gate, bridge, river,
1700 Govt. Intervention

› 1700’s population growth
› European registers in London, Paris, & Vienna
  • Military (conscription)
  • Policing (criminals & vagabonds)
  • Tax collection & census

“...street addresses were not invented to help you find your way; they were created to find you...”

- Author Deirdre Mask

London’s population growth:
- ~200,000 - 1600
- ~650,000 - 1750
- ~1 million - 1800
Early American Cities

18th Century - Order & Rationalization

“Philadelphia System”
› Democratization - grid
  • Streets (E/W): trees
  • Avenues (N/S): numerical
  • Odd/even addresses

Boston 1879 Ordinance
› Ease of Land Conveyance
  • Registry
  • Unique Names
Early American Cities

20th Century - Modern Reforms
› Chicago
› San Francisco
› Salt Lake City

Chicago’s “Street Nomenclature Plan”
› Ease of Commerce
  • Origin Point & Baseline Streets
  • Cardinal directions (N, S, E, & W)

San Francisco’s Street Commission
› Postal Service
› Renamed lettered streets w/ Spanish & Mexican heritage
Modern Nomenclature Systems

**SC State Statute, Section 6-29-1200**
- Grants power to local jurisdictions
- Planning Commission
- Approve/Rename Street or Road Names
- Recodration

**Established Criteria:**
- Duplication or confusion (e.g., mail)
- Simplifies location identification
- "Other good and just reason"

**Common Elements**
1. Origin Point
2. Reference Lines
3. Address Zones
4. Address Posting Rules
5. Street Naming Guidelines
6. Administration
Social Drivers of (Re)-Naming Streets
Adapting to New Functions

› Post-pandemic view of public space
› Temporary to permanent
› Segments of streets & portions of cities transform into parklets, pedestrian plazas, esplanades, promenades, paseos, and bike lanes

Source: MKSK - Spartanburg’s Morgan Square
Reclamation

› 2020: “Black Lives Matter Plaza”
› Permanent installation in Washington, D.C.
› Other cities followed, including Chicago, Baltimore, Charlotte, & Chattanooga, Spartanburg

Source: The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Photo courtesy of Ted Eyton
Cultural Values

› Honorary Designation or Proclamation
› Recognize and acknowledge cultural contributions
› Artists, Musicians, Poets, etc.

Source: Cincinnatti local Fox News station
Source: Tennessean article on Music Row
Example:
› 2020: New Orleans creates Street Renaming Commission to conduct audit of its streets
› From War relic to Artistic Expression

Source: New Orleans City Council Street Renaming Commission
“Street names attest to our history: they belong to a political choice, revealing the values that the city wishes to embody…”

Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, retitles Paris streets and squares

- 2014 - named after women contributing to arts & Sciences
- 2019 - re-named over 40 streets & squares honoring prominent LGBTQ figures

Source: FemiCite Paris Campaign
Street Naming Guidelines
A Street Named for a King: The Politics of Place-Naming

Jerry T. Mitchell and Derek H. Alderman

Streets are so common in everyday use that they often escape notice. Their names are more common still—with Second, Third, First, Fourth, and Park as the top five names in the United States. Yet some names evoke far more than a simple moniker atop a signpost. Consider Pennsylvania Avenue, Beale Street, or Sunset Boulevard and images of specific buildings, activities, people, or landscapes come to mind. For our classrooms, streets and their names can serve as an important component in teaching one of the main themes of geography—an appreciation of place.

An appreciation of place goes beyond a simple understanding of the human and physical characteristics of a location. Rather, this appreciation also involves recognizing how places are actively created or constructed by social actors and groups, who view and experience the wider world in different and sometimes competing ways. Consequently, the creation of place—how it appears and functions, and what it means to people—can become points of contest.

The “politics of place” has emerged as a major approach within geography, one that suggests that our most taken-for-granted places are formed through negotiation and even struggle as people engage in broader debates over culture, identity, and symbols.

Street-naming may at first glance appear to be a fairly innocuous exercise, a way of simply creating a system of spatial reference and orientation. Yet, street names are also symbols to which people attach meaning and from which they draw identity, and the naming process can give us insight into the history and social power relations in a particular place. When communities seek to commemorate their past through street signs, disagreement may arise over what or who is honored. In these instances, street names—as socially constructed and contested places—become important public arenas for debating whether certain historical figures are worthy of being remembered publicly. The remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) along America’s roadways is a noteworthy example of this dynamic. The United States now contains no fewer than 890 streets, boulevards, avenues, and courts named for the slain civil rights icon, according to our research. They number as high as 128 in Georgia to 1 in Wyoming and Alaska, and 10 states (mainly Mountain/Great Plains and New England) have none. The naming of streets for Dr. King is certainly about honoring his individual contributions, but it is also about creating places that retell the history of the United States to include a wider, more racially and ethnically diverse society. Even as streets named after King reflect the increased cultural and political power of blacks and the liberalization of white attitudes, they also are sites of struggle for African Americans. In particular, to name a street after King often involves determining where best to emplace his name within the community, deciding which street to name or re-name, and debating whether that location does justice to King’s memory. African American Dr. M L King Jr. Blvd., New Bern, North Carolina. (Photograph by Derek Alderman)
Street Naming Criteria

- Standardized process for reviewing, assigning, and renaming of street names

**Most common criteria used:**
- Indexing by number of alphabet
- Historical events
- Prominent figures
- Unique landmarks
- Geological formations
- Local themes or character
- Native trees, plants, or fauna
The Future of Addressing Systems...

Integral to Planning
› Greater complexity, nuance, & sophistication over time

Growth Management
› New growth areas; Infill development; multi-family development

Knowledge Management
› Multiple agencies; Essential services & utilities; delivery systems; marketing & economic development