Spanish & Portuguese Naming Traditions

Latin America is home to many cultures with different naming traditions. Indige- nous civilizations including the Aztec (Mexico), Inca, Maya, and Aymara lived in the lands today known as the "New World" for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. The Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the 1500s, but other peoples from other parts of the world (Africa, the Middle East, and Asia) arrived soon afterwards. For lack of space, and due to their prevalence, this section will cover only Spanish and Portuguese traditions. In Spanish-speaking (Hispanophone) cultures, a typical name is composed of a single or composite given name (nombre) and two family sur- names (apellido). Composite names are composed of two single names, though it is not uncommon to address someone by only the first of these; so, for example, Juan Pablo may go by either Juan or Juan Pablo. Traditionally, a person’s first surname is the maternal surname (apellido paterno), corresponding to their father’s first surname, and their second surname is the maternal surname (apellido materno), corresponding to their mother’s first surname. Hence, what we know as the moth- er’s maiden name in Anglophone cultures. This is in fact passed down a generation further in Hispanophone cultures. As a patriarchal so- ciety, if the couple have children, he or she will inherit the father’s paternal surname and the mother’s paternal surname. Women in Hispanophone cultures typically do not change their name when married. Hence, it is standard for the father, mother, and children in one family to all have distinct surnames. It is standard in Hispanophone cultures to address an individual by only their first surname, the apellido paterno. In Portuguese-speaking cultures, naming customs are slightly more variable. While Usualpone names also contain one or two given names and two surnames, generally, though not al- ways, the surnames take the reverse order than Spanish, with the maternal surname coming before the paternal surname. It is also quite common for a child to inherit both of the father’s and both of the mother’s sur- names so that each of the grandparents’ last names is retained. As would be expected, often Spanish and Portuguese given names are passed down from father to son and mother to daughter, and so on. In terms of their etymology, by and large common names in Spanish and Portuguese cultures are drawn from the “Holy Family” the apostles, and saints of the Christian religious tradition. By far the most popular non-religious names in Latin America are those of the Virgin Mary, and usually appended with a specific local tribe or related suffix name (e.g., Maria de los Mercedes, Maria del Carmen). Some of the most frequently occurring first names for men are Juan, José, and Pablo, and it is even quite common to give a child the name of the savior, (Jesus), or Messiah. Surnames generally derive their meaning from either patronymic or toponymic relationships or from religious or occupational significance. Patronymic names are characterized by the suffixes -ez, -ez, -e in Spanish surnames, and -e in Portuguese surnames, which denote the relation “the son of” so that Ferreira means “the son of Fernandes,” and Ruiz, “the son of Ruiz.” Toponymic surnames describe the geographical origin of a person with respect to either a specific ancestral location or to a specific geographic feature, as for example with the Spanish Rios (river), del Mor- te (from the mountain), and Navarro (city of Navarre), and the Portuguese Oliveira (olive tree) and Almeida (city of Almeida). Religious surnames are also wide- spread and can derive from particular church locations, religious figures, festivals, or broader concepts, as for example with San Nicolás (St. Nicholas) and del Rosario (of the Rosary) and the Portuguese do Ano Santo (of the Annunciation of the Vir- gin Mary), or de Concepción (of the Immacu- late Conception of the Virgin Mary). Orien- tational surnames include Herrera (Smith), Zapatero (Schuhmacher), and Caballero (Knight). It is not uncommon for some Hispano- phone immigrants to drop their maternal

EXAMPLE: PORTUGUESE NAME

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