

# Brittany, Joshua top North Country names

By MIKE PETERSON  
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Jessica and Michael may be popular with the folks down in New York City, but North Country parents prefer Brittany, Sarah and Joshua.

Judging by birth announcements submitted to the Press-Republican from June of 1989 to June 1990, Michael, which has been the most popular name in New York City for nearly 30 years, is only No. 3 here, topped by both Joshua and Matthew.

Meanwhile, poor Jennifer, queen of nomenclature in the city for two decades, was recently demoted to No. 2 there, behind Jessica, and is No. 13 in the North Country. Brittany and Sarah tied for most popular names among girls here, each more than doubling the number of Jennifers for the year, while Amanda was only No. 3 by the smallest possible margin. Amanda was No. 1 as the most popular girl's name under a single spelling, since Brittany also appeared as Britney, Britney and Britnie, and several Sarahs were born without H's.

There is a significant difference between New York City and the North Country throughout the lists of popular names. The North Country list contains ties at No. 10 for both boys' and girls' names, but, even with those improved chances, only 10 names on either New York City Top 10 list make the local charts.

For this area, the girls' Top 10 list is actually a "Top 12," because of a three-way tie among Elizabeth, Emily and Nicole. Still, only four of the names on the most current Top 10 girls' list from the Big Apple appear on the North Country list: Nicole, Samantha and Ashley.

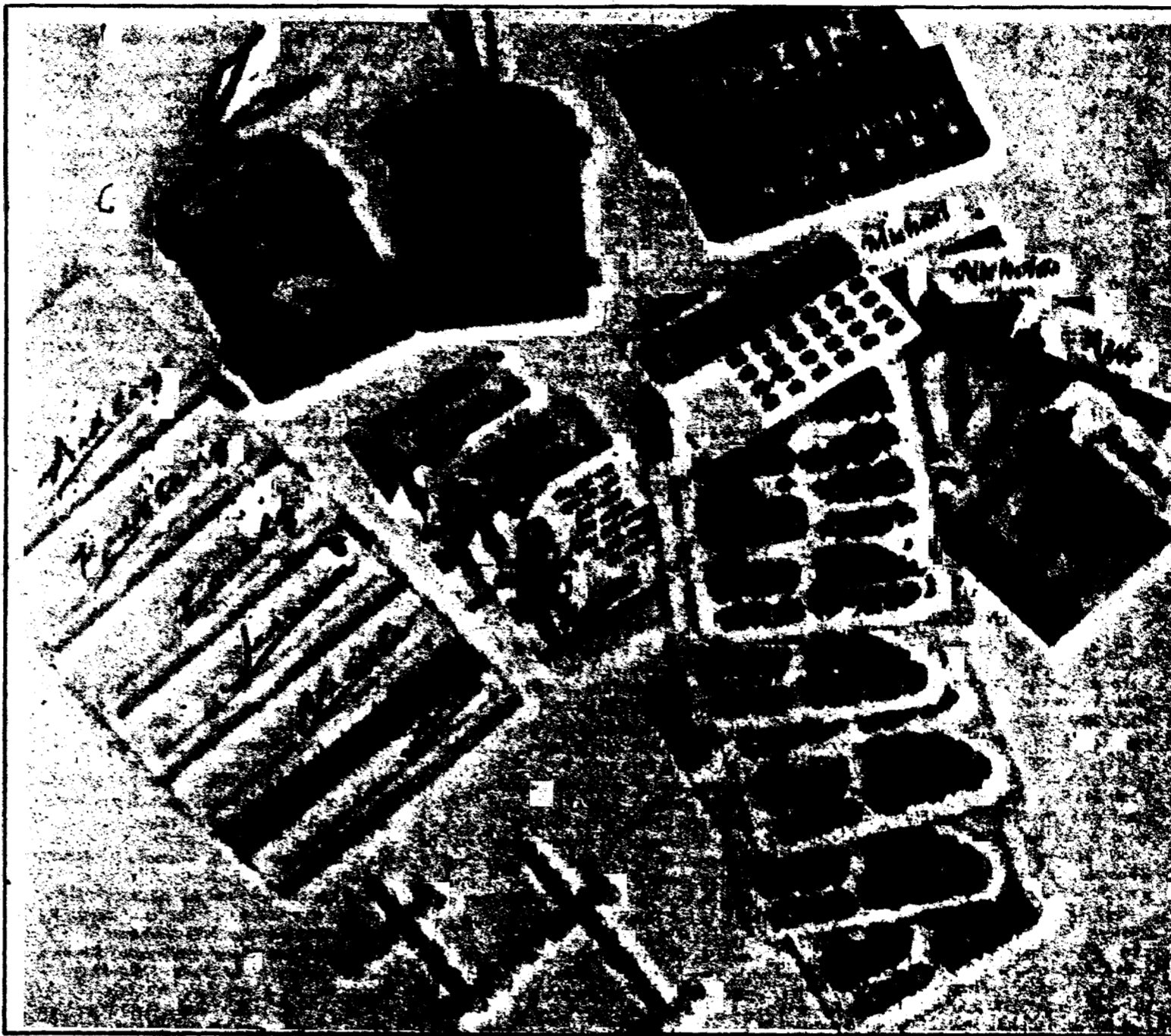
Among boys, there is a five-way tie for No. 10 in the North Country, making it a "Top 14," but, even then, only half of the Big Apple's Top 10 names made the local list: Michael, Christopher, David, Andrew and Matthew.

#### J-names and starlets

Both lists show the influence of modern culture, particularly among girls' names. The boys' list shows fads, particularly

## TOP GIRLS' NAMES

1. Brittany (25), Britney, Brittney, Britnie (1 each), Sarah (20), Sara (8)
3. Amanda (27)
4. Kayla (20), Kaela, Kayeka (1 ea.)
5. Ashley (14), Ashleigh, Ashlie, Ashlee (1 ea.)
6. Jessica (16)
7. Heather (15), Chelsea (10), Chelsey (2), Chelcie, Chelsy, Chelsie (1 each), Samantha (15)
10. Elizabeth (14), Emily (14), Nicole (11), Nikkole (1), Nichole (2)



Photo/P. Moicus

## FAVORITE BOYS' NAMES

1. Joshua (43)
2. Matthew (25), Michael (24), Mickael (1)
4. Kyle (21)
5. Christopher (20), Ryan (19), Rian (1)
7. Nicholas (18), Nicolas (1)
8. Justin (16)
9. James (15)
10. Andrew (13), Benjamin (13), David (13), Patrick (13), Thomas (13)

Joshua and Justin, which are part of a J-name phenomenon that also includes Jason as well as Jennifer and Jessica. But the names are still, for the most part, rooted in tradition.

Dr. Leonard Ashley, a professor of English at Brooklyn College of CUNY and author of "What's In A Name?" (Genealogical Press, Baltimore, 1989), decries the marked tendency towards frivolous names that dominates the girls' list, calling them "bim-bostarlet" names.

"Like 'Morgan Fairchild,'" he says. "There's even someone called 'Morgan Brittany,' which uses two of them. These are like 'rhinestone' names. They are

theatrical costumes that people put on to get noticed."

Americans are conformists, he said, but still want their children to stand out. "They pick out some name that sounds more unusual than John or Mary or Anne, and they discover, later, that the kid has been given a name that everyone who wants an unusual name has chosen."

Too often, he suggests, the large number of children with the same name leads to unkind nicknames aimed at distinguishing, for example, the Jennifer who is a bit overweight from the Jennifer who isn't. By contrast, he said, parents who pick a truly unusual name may fear that the child will be teased,

but, unless there is some foolish or villainous fictional or historic character with the name, the name will not carry any negative connotations.

#### Ethnic names change

Names used to anchor a child, making a statement about who that child was, Ashley says. Today, however, names have lost their meaning and especially their ethnic identity. "You even have Jewish children named 'Christopher' ('Christ-bearer')," he says. "Kevin used to be only Irish; now you have Kevin Kline and all other sorts of Kevins. Irish are taking even more Irish names, like Conor, but no Irish would use Tyrone (A county in

Ireland and a common Irish surname), because it's considered a Black name."

A name can also anchor a child through understanding how it was chosen. "To try to find out their identities, and to try to make them, kids ask themselves, 'Who am I supposed to be?' And they know, 'My family tells me I'm a Tyler, because my great-great-grandfather was President Tyler,' and it gives them family connections and roots," he says.

#### Names carry weight

More important than any cultural oddities, however, are the influences a name may have on the person who bears it, Ashley

warns, and here is where he particularly worries about the whimsical names being given to little girls with no thought to how it will seem for a grown woman.

"The idea of giving cutesy little names is bad enough for poodles, but, if you are going to do it, do it to pets, not to children," he says. "If she grows up and wants to be district attorney, she's not going to make it with a name like 'Bambi.' When she grows up, and she wants to run for the presidency, nobody is going to vote for her, nobody is going to take her seriously."

On the other hand, Ashley

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Photo provided

Mary Beth Evans and Stephen Nichols — Kayla and Patch on "Days of Our Lives" — inspire many to name their babies Kayla.

## There are many Kaylas

By MIKE PETERSON  
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — There sure seem to be a lot of little North Country girls named after Mary Beth Evans.

No, there weren't any Mary Beths announced in the Press-Republican over the past year, though two of the area's three Marys were named Mary Elizabeth. But there were 22 Kaylas, and that is the character that actress Mary Beth Evans plays on the daytime drama "Days of Our Lives."

Mothers once named their daughters for movie stars like Linda Darnell or Debbie Reynolds, or for the characters they played, Amber and Tammy. Today, the cultural trend remains, but the medium is different.

Kayla Brady certainly isn't the only soap opera character whose name shows up on the Top 10 lists for the North Country. Although only two boys' names — Kyle ("Generations") and Justin ("Days of Our Lives") — have soap opera counterparts, the girls' list reads like a roster of daytime characters: Brittany, Ashley and Nichole are all on "The Young and the Restless," and Nichole is also the name of a character on "Another World." Sarah is also a character on "One Life to Live," Amanda is on "Another World," Chelsea appears on "The Guiding Light," and Emily has two characters with her name: One on "All My Children," and one on "As The World Turns." Even Heather is a soap opera character, a baby on "Loving."

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## Choosing a name varies by culture

By MIKE PETERSON  
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PLATTSBURGH — There are nearly as many ways to choose a name as there are names to choose, and there is even a field of study devoted to names: onomastics.

Many American names derive from Middle Eastern peoples, primarily the Greeks and Jews. Many names considered European are descended from these Eurasian cultures, often in the form of Biblical names that may have gone through several changes along the way. Others, both Eurasian and from Western roots, describe physical or spiritual attributes, such as size, wisdom or coloring.

In "The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names," (Oxford University Press, 1947), E.G. Withycombe noted that Hebrew names tended originally to be two-part names with definite meaning, such as Elisha, meaning "to whom the Lord is Saviour." But, while Jewish names had specific meaning, that doesn't mean they couldn't be common, and the Jews sometimes used patronymics, or names that refer to the father, to distinguish individuals: Jonas bar Simon was Jonas the son of Simon, as distinct from Jonas bar David.

While Greek names emphasize intellectual attributes, Withycombe said, the Celtic-based names that came through various western nations tend more toward physical descriptions. During the Reformation, English Puritans went through a period of naming children for spiritual gifts, such as Hope and Charity, for moral attributes like "Prudence or Chastity," or for more complicated statements: names like Sorry-for-Sin and The Lord is Near were also recorded, Withycombe wrote.

#### Timing of birth

Another source of names in European culture is circumstances at birth. A child born at Christmas, for example, could be named Noel, while more than one baby born in the back of a squad car has been named for the officer who assisted the frantic parents. The Bible recalls that, when the childless Sarah was told she would become pregnant, she laughed aloud, because she was past menopause. But pregnant she became, and her son's name, Isaac, means "laughing."

African cultures tend to place much more importance on those occasions, according to "A Handbook of African Names" by Ihechukwa Madubuike (Three Continents Press, 1976): While the continent has a variety of cultures and traditions, many Africans use the day or circumstances of birth in the name of the child. Among the Akan of Ghana, for example, children are named for the seventh day following their birth, a practice based on the not-uncommon tradition that it is unlucky or unwise to name a child before its survival is somewhat certain. By knowing the naming tradition, one can infer that Ghana's first premier, Kwame Nkrumah, was born seven days before a Saturday.

Because they often reflect family events surrounding the birth, African children's names may preserve more history than simply the day the child was born: A child named Arusi was born during a wedding, but Kesi was born when the father was having problems and Haoniyao was born during a time of quarrels. By reciting the names of ancestors, one also recites a capsule history of the family.

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Staff Photo/Mike Peterson

Arbab Eagle Washington Nunn Khan is the pride and joy of his parents, Mary Nunn Khan and Abdul Khan.

## ... But only 1 Arbab

By MIKE PETERSON  
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PLATTSBURGH — When the Joshuas in his class are being called Joshua T. and Joshua R. and the Sarahs are being called Bionde Sarah and Sarah With Glasses, everyone will know which one you mean when you just say "Arbab." Arbab Eagle Washington Nunn Khan will not have to share his name with very many classmates, and that is how his parents wanted it.

"He has a very good, very strong name, and I am very proud of it," says his father, Abdul Khan. "Every second person is a Dave or a Steve."

Arbab's name is intended to give him a sense of his own special identity, his parents say, and each element of his name was chosen to remind him of who he is, no matter what else may happen to him along the way.

"We are his parents," Abdul says. "Whether we are rich or poor, or no matter where we may live, we wanted to give him a good name."

His name is his story: His father's family was from eastern India, but left for West Pakistan in 1970 after the war when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Abdul left Pakistan as a young man and went to work in Dubai and, later, in Saudi Arabia, where he met his first Americans. Working with Americans, he found, was different than working for other people: the friendship and acceptance they ex-

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