

## Nicknames for New York City

Now the VOA Special English program Words and Their Stories.

A nickname is a shortened form of a person's name. A nickname also can be a descriptive name for a person, place or thing.

Many American cities have nicknames. These can help establish an identity, spread pride among citizens and build unity.

A few years ago, some marketing and advertising experts were asked to name the best nickname for an American city. The winner was the nation's largest city, New York. The top nickname was the Big Apple.

You might wonder how New York got this nickname. In the early 1970s, the city had many problems. The number of visitors was falling. So a campaign was launched to give the city a new image. The head of the New York Conventions and Visitors Bureau decided to call the city The Big Apple.

There are several explanations for where this name came from. Language expert Barry Popik studied the question and wrote about it on his website. He says John Fitz Gerald, a writer for a New York newspaper, used the name the Big Apple to mean New York in the 1920s. Mr. Fitz Gerald wrote about horse races. He heard the name used by men who worked at a racetrack in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Mister Fitz Gerald wrote: “The Big Apple. The dream of every lad that ever threw a leg over a thoroughbred and the goal of all horsemen. There's only one Big Apple. That's New York.”

In horse racing, the expression meant “the big time,” the place where large amounts of money could be won.

The Big Apple became the name of a night club in the Harlem area of New York City in 1934. It also was the name of a popular dance and a hit song in the 1930s.

But it is not the only nickname for America’s largest city. Barry Popik’s website lists almost 100 nicknames that describe New York. The best known are the Capital of the World. Empire City. Gotham. The City So Nice They Named It Twice. And the City That Never Sleeps. You can hear about the city in the song, “New York, New York” by Frank Sinatra.

This program was written by Shelley Gollust. I’m Barbara Klein.