Reviews

A Matter of Taste. How Names, Fashions, and Culture Change. By Stanley Lieberson. Yale Univ. Press. 2000. Pp. xvi-334. Hard cover. $29.95.

Stanley Lieberson's *A Matter of Taste* is probably the most important book on given names published by a social scientist to date. This is true even though Lieberson's focus is not solely on explaining changes in fashions of given names, but also in using these as an example of how all fashions or trends affecting the "cultural surface" change through time. Persons who read this book will learn fascinating details about changes in fashion for hemlines, automobile styles, men's hats, and even facial hair. For onomasts, there are also revealing discussions of the increase in the use of informal nicknames in American culture, and the influence of feminism on the use of "Mrs. John Smith" vs. "Jane Smith" among Boston's elite. But given names are Lieberson's main focus in analyzing changes in taste in this book, and his work will provide the foundation for all future research in this area.

Perhaps Lieberson's most important goal in *A Matter of Taste* is to show that simplistic unitary explanations for fashion are untenable. In his first chapter he discusses the three factors that must be taken into account in explaining any changes in taste: external events of social significance; internal mechanisms of taste that generate changes in fashion without reference to outside influences; and the unique historical conditions of a particular time. His most important conclusion about this complexity may be that it is "treacherous to casually use an external social development to explain an observed change in fashion"—something that has happened too frequently in the past when onomasts have tried to explain fads and trends in given names. The popularity of many names has been attributed to single historical events or celebrity influences without adequate data to support this notion. (In this context Lieberson rightly chides this reviewer for too glibly explaining *Linda's* popularity in the 1950s as being due to a particular popular song.) In reality multiple influences are always operating, whether one is

explaining the rise and fall of particular names or analyzing broader trends in name fashions.

Of course the prerequisite for having either internal or external factors influence name fashions is for the naming of children to become a matter of fashion in the first place. In Lieberson's second chapter, he present evidence from several European countries showing that lists of the most common given names were remarkably constant over generations almost everywhere until sometime after 1850 (somewhat earlier in England). After that, fashion takes over and the popular names change ever more rapidly almost everywhere in the Western world. Lieberson shows that this cultural change is correlated with increasing education and urbanization, and was well established before the advent of movies, radio, and television.

After given names became a matter of taste, much of the change in popular ones, as with all fashions, has been produced by internal mechanisms. The most important internal process is what Lieberson calls "the ratchet effect": changes in fashion from year to year occur by making small modifications to existing tastes, but such changes tend to proceed in one direction because quick reversals in fashion would make it impossible for those who wish to be fashionable to know when something was "out of style." Lieberson applies this to names by discussing sound shifts (for example, how names starting with *J-* increased while those starting with *H-* decreased during the twentieth century), and shifts in the sources of popular given names. The ratchet effect certainly explains the increasing use of Biblical names in the United States better than attributing this to any religious revival, as Biblical names rose while church attendance declined. Closely related to the ratchet effect is the phenomenon of expansion from a "taste stem." For example, *Carol's* popularity in the early twentieth century led to subsequent fashions for *Carolyn, Karen,* and *Carrie.*

As for what might be called "broad" external influences, Lieberson finds little correlation between the concentration or continuity of popular names in the United States with economic or political changes. Using data from Texas, he also finds little evidence for the common theory that name fashions change because blue collar parents imitate those of

higher social status. Interestingly, in his chapter on ethnic differences Lieberson does find that tastes in girls' names among Jews in California predict names that will be generally popular a few years down the road, perhaps because of the influence of Jewish culture on the entertainment industry.

Most of the examples of external influences which Lieberson finds evidence for are much more specific. For example, he believes that the fall off in the name *Donald* and increases in *Jacqueline* can be attributed to the "contamination" or "enhancement" effects of Donald Duck and Jacqueline Kennedy. However, in his discussion of the effects of entertainment on naming patterns, Lieberson focuses on debunking those who simplistically attribute a name's popularity to a movie star or film character's fame. Though he finds a few names owing their popularity to stars (*Marlene, Shelley*, and *Gary*, for example), he finds more examples of stars "riding the curve": an actor chooses a stage name, or a screenwriter chooses a character's name, which is already rising in popularity for other reasons. Therefore the name's expansion cannot be directly attributed to the movies (*Sandra, Rita*, and *Kevin* are clear examples of this.) And Lieberson's full argument implies that those movie-introduced names which do make it to the top of the popularity charts almost always fit in with sound shifts already being put into place by the ratchet effect. *Gary* was popular along with *Larry* and *Jerry*, and *Arlene* paved the way for *Marlene's* success.

There are a few minor disappointments in Lieberson's book. I believe that he dismisses the influence of the mass media on the shift from custom to fashion in the naming system too quickly, because he shows only that this shift occurred before the advent of the electronic mass media. Before radio and movies existed, there were popular magazines, dime novels, and even traveling theater companies. Lieberson himself points out that many new names were created by nineteenth century novelists. I think it's still possible that exposure to fictional characters was a main path by which education and urbanization made given names into an object of fashion.

I also think that Lieberson, in his urge to debunk simplistic correlations between the movies and name fashions, sometimes

overstates his case. For example, he says "it would be a big mistake to attribute any causal connection" between the name *Shirley's* popularity and Shirley Temple. Though his data clearly show that *Shirley* became a common name during the 1920s, before Shirley Temple was born, the name had already started to decline when it suddenly took a big jump in 1934. Such a sudden reversal of a decline would seem to call for a causal explanation, and looking at the graphs it seems reasonable to me to say that about a third of the American girls born between 1934 and 1939 who were named Shirley would probably have been called something else if Shirley Temple had never existed. Perhaps because I'm a psychologist rather than a sociologist, I also think Lieberson may dismiss increases in names that don't rise to "top fifty" levels too quickly. He thinks that because in its peak year there were fewer than ninety girls named *Lana* born in Illinois, that Lana Turner's effect on American names was unimportant. However, that figure implies that there were over 1400 girls named *Lana* born in the United States in that one year, so over the course of Turner's entire career it's probable that there were at least 3,000 American girls named *Lana* who would have been called something else otherwise. This seems of both psychological and historical interest to me.

My main disappointment, though, is Lieberson's ignoring of television in his discussion of the influence of entertainment on names. He only refers to movies, when from 1950 on the number of Americans exposed to even a mildly popular television character greatly exceeded those exposed to most popular film characters. It's therefore logical to assume that television could have had a greater impact than the movies did on naming patterns. I'm sure that when such research is done there will be many instances of television characters and stars "riding the curve." I remember when I was first researching names that my mother's favorite soap opera, *As The World Turns*, introduced two characters in their thirties called *Jennifer* and *Kimberly* just after these names had become popular for newborns. But there also seem to be cases (such as the rapid expansion of *Kelly* as a girls' name just after the series *Bachelor Father* began to air) where television probably had a major impact.

An appreciation of television's influence could even have improved Lieberson's otherwise excellent discussion of the popularity of *Rebecca*, a name with an unusual history that calls for some external influences to explain it. *Rebecca* rose to a moderate degree of popularity during the 1940s, but then plateaued at that level for almost twenty years until it had another surge of popularity that took it into the top 20 American girls' names in the 1970s. Curiously, Lieberson wants to attribute the latter surge to Cicely Tyson's character in the movie *Sounder*, even though he admits that the increase began at least a year before the movie was released. I think that the character of Rebecca in the television series *Daniel Boone* (originally broadcast from 1964 to 1970) is a more likely influence, especially since *Daniel Boone* was just the sort of series popular with children and teens where a delayed effect on name popularity might be anticipated. (Lieberson mentions the possible delayed effect of entertainment targeted to children more than once, but he himself gives no specific examples of it.)

The above minor criticisms are of course matters for further research, and they are nitpicks compared to the wealth of information and inspiration for such future research that are found in *A Matter of Taste*. As Lieberson himself points out in his discussion of the possible impact of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal on the name *Monica*, the mechanisms that lie behind rises and falls in name popularity are multifaceted and complex, and numerical changes may run counter to the impact of an event on the majority if a minority has radically different tastes. Much work remains to be done on understanding name fashions and parental name choices as a nonmaterial and symbolic cultural feature, and Lieberson himself "hopes [this book] will not be the last word." With his research to motivate other scholars, his hopes will surely be realized.

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A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names. By Kenneth Cameron. English Place-Name Society, Popular Series, Volume I. Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 1998. Pp xxviii + 157. £11.95.

A Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names. By Victor Watts. English Place-Name Society, Popular Series, Volume III. Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 2002. Pp. xxxiii + 172. Maps. £11.95.

English Place-Names in Skaldic Verse. By Matthew Townend. English Place-Name Society, Extra Series, Volume I. Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 1998. Pp ix + 115. £10.00.

The Place-Names of West Thorney. By Richard Coates. English Place-Name Society, Supplementary Series, No. 1. Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 1999. Pp. v + 65. £7.00.

Since 1924, the English Place-Name Society has been publishing annual volumes (78 of them at the latest count) devoted to the place names of individual counties, initially in single volumes, later in multiple ones. These have been models of their kind, in both contents and layout, offering full evidence in support of their historical record and of the derivations advanced. While useful at various levels of inquiry, these volumes have been chiefly aimed at specialist scholars and serious amateur students of names, local history, etc. It is a pleasure to be able to draw attention to three recent ancillary series of publications, inaugurated, respectively, by some of the books under review.

One of these new ventures, the "Popular Series," is intended for the wider public and will consist of one-volume county place name dictionaries serving as guides to the major names of individual counties. It is appropriate that the first volume in this series should be *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names* by the late Kenneth Cameron, for many years Director of the English Place-Name Survey and author not only of the three-volume survey of *The Place-Names of Derbyshire* (1959) but also, more recently and significantly, of *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire*, six volumes of which appeared between 1985 and 2001. The book under review is therefore a popular parallel publication to the specialist multi-volume edition, drawing on the same materials and on the author's intimate knowledge of Lincolnshire and of its toponymy, making it more accessible than, but as equally authoritative as, the

Survey's set of county volumes. The *Dictionary* also benefits from the author"s wider vision found in his *English Place-Names* (1961; 1988).

As is to be expected, the main substance of the book consists of an alphabetically arranged dictionary of almost 1000 place names, their early spellings and sources, and their etymologies, together with references to their elements. The elements themselves are listed in an eleven-page register, from Old Norse *á* "a river, a stream" to Old English *wyrhta* "a wright". A perusal of this list alone gives one preliminary hints of the richness and linguistic origins of the place name inventory but it pays off to read the brief introduction in order to obtain a more systematic narrative overview.

The major criterion for a name's selection for inclusion appears to have been that it be recorded on the 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey Map. These comprise all the names of parishes and joint-parishes and some of the less important places recorded from the 12th to the 15th centuries. In keeping with the general strategy of the English Place-Name Survey, which treats place names primarily as sources for the elucidation of linguistic history, few names first found in post-1500 sources have been included, since, in the author's view, "they are either self-explanatory or of uncertain meaning" (xv). There is no doubt that the earlier names are, in general, more "interesting" by offering the name detective greater scope for etymological discovery and clarification but, when considered in the context of a complete toponymic landscape and of the county's place name corpus as a whole, there are really no "self-explanatory" names, especially when their changing contents and status over the centuries is taken into account. Nevertheless, a cut-off date of 1500, imposed for whatever reasons, has undoubtedly helped to keep this "popular" *Dictionary* within reasonable size. Once the decision has been made to publish something that is less than comprehensive, difficult choices are bound to have to be made.

The chronological and linguistic scope of Lincolnshire place names reaches from pre-Celtic old European river names (Ancholme, Humber, Welland), via Celtic names of watercourses (such as Glen, Lynn, Nene, and Trent) and partially Celtic names like Kesteven, Lincoln, Lindsay, and (in part translation, Horncastle) to that fascinating interplay between Old Norse and Old English names, including what Cameron has always termed "hybrids" but what are really English names in *-tūn*, in which

the first element is a Danish personal name (Barkston, Branston, Croxton, etc.), sometimes replacing an earlier English one.

The second volume in the "Popular Series," *Wirral and its Viking Heritage*, by Paul Cavill, Stephen E. Harding and Judith Jesch, though containing a gazetteer examining the origins of the major place names, is directed more toward historians and archaeologists and therefore deserves only cursory mention.

The third volume, however, by Victor Watts, the current Director of the English Place-Name Survey, forms the second of the projected series of one-volume dictionaries. *A Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names* differs from its Lincolnshire counterpart insofar as the county series has not yet covered Durham in its publications. Nevertheless, the "popular" version benefits from the fact that its author has also for some considerable time been engaged in the preparation of the Survey's volumes and is therefore the major expert on the place names of County Durham, which last received scholarly treatment in 1920 in Allen Mawer's *The Place-names of Northumberland and Durham.* Victor Watts' new book is therefore doubly welcome, and one can only hope that the neighboring county of Northumberland will also soon find a slot in the "Popular Series."

The contents and arrangement of the Durham *Dictionary* are similar to those of its Lincolnshire predecessor, and do not need special mention here, with the exception of the additional provision of lists of "Personal Names in County Durham Place-Names" and of "Surnames and Manorial Names in the Place-Names of County Durham." A quick look at the list of "Place-Name Elements" reveals a much smaller proportion of Old Norse etymons in comparison with Danelaw Lincolnshire, a fact which is explained by the author's statement, in the introduction, that "Viking settlement in Durham seems to have been limited to [the] southern area although Viking lordship, as opposed to settlement, seems to have reached inland as far as Auckland" (xvii). Just as in Lincolnshire, the oldest stratum of Celtic names is of watercourses, names like Cocker, Derwent, Eden and Kent (the Deerness probably also belongs to this group although Watt regards it as pre-Celtic). A distribution map of English habitation names (reprinted from P. H. Sawyer's *English Medieval Settlement*) shows the extent of Anglo-Saxon colonisation after the middle of the fifth century; the map is complemented and contrasted by a map of "Woodland Names" from the same source. The *Dictionary*

does not contain any examples of early Old English *-ingas* or *-inga* names. Otherwise the inventory of names presented reflects the various phases and kinds of impact of English settlement on the landscape of this northeastern English county.

It should be mentioned that, in contrast to Cameron, Watts includes National Grid references which are very helpful in finding the location of the features to which the names apply. Otherwise, like Cameron, he uses the same somewhat idiosyncratic system of abbreviations which has been employed by the Survey volumes for many decades. This system expands any references one may come across in the text of the volume but, while familiar to long term editors and users of the county volumes, makes it difficult for others to discover whether a certain source has been used or bibliographical references have been cited or not. It is perhaps a little churlish to include this comment, which draws attention to an irritation rather than a deficiency, and, on the whole, the English Place-Name Society is to be congratulated not only on inaugurating its "Popular Series" but also on making Kenneth Cameron's *Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names* and Victor Watts' *Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names* two of their three leadoff volumes. This is an auspicious beginning, and surely this reviewer is not the only one who hopes that, by drawing on the richness of the existing county volumes or of those in the making, the "Popular Series" will grow rapidly.

The second new series which appears to have been dubbed somewhat blandly the "Extra Series" is conceived, according to the General Editor's *Introduction*, as consisting of monographs ancillary and supplementary to the Survey of English Place-Names and might include such desiderata as a working handlist of Anglo-Saxon personal names found in placenames, or an analysis of the elements found in Anglo-Saxon charter boundary clauses. The first, and so far only, monograph in this series is Matthew Townend's study of *English Place-Names in Skaldic Verse*. The introductory chapter deals with such preliminary topics as "English Place-Names in Old Norse Sources," the nature of "Skaldic Verse," "Skaldic Verse Relating to English," and the transmission and reliability of the texts. Townend makes a special point of emphasizing that the Skaldic strophes studied here are preserved only in the context of 12th and 13th century prose texts from Iceland (11). Chapter 2 contains a gazetteer of about 24 place names, such as Assatún(ir), Brandfurða, and Danaskogar, and 6 river names, including

Fljót, Humra, and Temps(á), and extracts from Skaldic verse, together with extensive commentaries on each. In the third chapter, the author discusses the onomastic value of the corpus of English place names in Skaldic verse, the question of Anglo-Norse language contact, the high level of accuracy in the Scandinavianization and transmission of names in the texts in question, the considerable historical value of the Skaldic citations, and the poetic nature of the texts in which the place names have been preserved. A list of manuscripts consulted and a bibliography complete the work. If further publications in the "Extra Series" come up to the high standards of scholarship displayed in the inaugural monograph, we can look forward to a set of handy, reliable, and sometimes unusual, tools.

The first volume to appear in the "Supplementary Series" is Richard Coates' survey of *The Place-Names of West Thorney*, an island parish at the extreme western end of Sussex. In keeping with the general plans for this series, this study is intended "to begin to make good the sparse treatment of minor names in the English Place-Name Survey when it tackled Sussex in the first decade of the Survey's existence." (The two Sussex volumes were published in 1929–30.) At the same time, the author wanted to make a contribution "to an understanding of the processes of naming in self-contained places" (1). As the major purpose of the book is historical, its findings depend much on the documentary evidence available for the place itself, including questions of tenure and agricultural development but, as Coates stresses, there is also much here that is of potential interest to the historically-oriented linguist. The book demonstrates very clearly the need for an intensive investigation of so-called "minor" names in any landscape, as well as the necessity for filling the gaps left, in this respect, by the early volumes of the English Place-Name Survey. While it may not be possible to substitute for these more comprehensive multi-volume versions, the kind of study that Coates has undertaken is probably the best way of making gradual amends.

The creation of these three new series is a distinctive feather in the cap for those currently at the helm of the English Place-Name Society.

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Terra Incognita: The True Story of How America Got Its Name. By Rodney Broome. Educare Press. PO BOX 17222, Seattle WA 98107. Pp. xxiv-188. $25.00

Americans grow up believing in the absolute truths about the beginnings of their nation: the date of its independence, the number of the first colonies that created it, the first president of the United States of America, and the source of the name *America.* The answers revealed in countless history books and encyclopedias are of course: July 4, 1776; 13; George Washington; and Amerigo Vespucci. Well, Rodney Broome wants all Americans as well as all North Americans, Central Americans, South Americans, and everyone in the world to believe that the fourth answer should in truth be Richard Amerike, a Bristol merchant and financial backer of expeditions in the late 1400s.

Broome was born in Bristol, England in 1944, but has lived for well over half his life in Seattle, Washington. In tracing his roots in England and Wales, he became intrigued with why history had failed to acknowledge the apparent source of the real name for the New World, and had falsely credited a minor Florentine navigator and ship captain.

In 17 chapters over 120 pages, Broome relates the details of a statement written on a 1507 map by Martin Waldseemüller at Saint-Dié, near Strasbourg in present-day eastern France. That affirmed the belief that the continental mass between Europe and Asia had been named America after Amerigo Vespucci.

In the first chapter, Broome provides the oft-repeated translation of what Waldseemüller had written on his map: "But now these parts (Europe, Africa, Asia) have been extensively explored, and a fourth part has been discovered by Americus Vespuccius; I do not see what right any one would have to object to calling this part Americus; who discovered it and who is a man of intelligence, and so to name it Amerige that is the land land of Americus, or America, since both Europe and Asia got their names from women" (7). Copies of the map were widely distributed across Europe. Dissent quickly spread, especially by the Spaniards, because Christopher Columbus had been acclaimed more than a decade before to be the discoverer of the New World, on behalf of Spain's Queen Isabella. Waldseemüller substituted Terra Incognita for America on his 1513 map, and conferred the right

of discovery on Columbus, but the die had been cast: the new continental mass would forever bear the Latin form of the forename of Vespucci. From various sources, Broome has gathered valuable details on Richard Amerike, who was a prominent merchant in Bristol in the late 1400s, and who served as the Royal Customs Officer for 10 years. Broome reports that Amerike was a large investor in the John Cabot expeditions of 1497 and 1498, and states without attribution that "Many believe that Cabot named an island or territory after his sponsor, Richard Amerike" (91).

Historians usually report that Cabot's 1498 expedition disappeared without a trace. Nevertheless, Broome is convinced that Cabot and the crews of his ships sailed all the way south to present day Venezuela, where the Spanish Admiral Alonzo Hojeda stole his charts (with "America" describing a territory in that area), destroyed his ships, and slaughtered his crews in August, 1499. Certainly Hojeda was rewarded by the Spanish Crown for stopping the English incursion into the Caribbean sea, but was Cabot the transgressor?

As a geographer and a historian, I would like to believe that Waldseemüller made a big mistake in 1507 when he attributed the naming of America after Vespucci, because other than using the first names of monarchs and popes to name geographical features, most features named after individuals in the Western World reflect their surnames, as in Bolivia, Colombia, Washington, Vancouver, Austin, Dallas, and on and on. In honoring Vespucci for having found that there was a fourth continent between Europe and Cathay, I would expect Waldseemüller to have written Vespucia on his maps.

There is no absolute evidence that America, in any or all of its forms, owes its name to Richard Amerike. Broome, unfortunately, has not found the true story of how America got its name; what he has produced in his slim book could be best described as *Veritas Incognita,* 'the unknown truth'.

As Broome reports, in 1955 the University of Michigan scholar Hayward Keniston found John (Broome writes Johan) Day's 1497 letter to Christopher Columbus where he stated that the "men of Bristol found . . . 'Brazil' as your Lordship well knows. It was called the Island of Brazil, and it is assumed and believed to be the mainland that the men

from Bristol found" (128). The "men of Bristol" could very well have been Cabot's crews; the "mainland" was likely the eastern seaboard of North America, and not the present nation of Brazil.

Broome makes no reference to other competing origins of America. Etymologist Allen Walker Read drew attention in 1985 at a Names Institute meeting in Madison, NJ, to a theory advanced by French geologist Jules Marcou. Influenced by English scientist Thomas Belt's reference to "Amerrique range" in Nicaragua, Marcou wrote in the March 1875 issue of Atlantic Monthly that "Admiral Colombo [was] the first European who heard and pronounced the word Americ or Amerrique, although we have no material certainty of this." Subsequently, in the 1890 annual report of the Smithsonian Institution, Marcou had become quite convinced of his theory, writing that "After the last voyage of Colombo of 1503 the name Amerrique spread so fast in Europe among the sailors and common people that in 1515 it was generally adopted and used to designate the New World. Such are facts which seem well established."

Is Marcou's theory plausible? What about a couple of other theories noted by Read: 1) America was derived from *Alemeki* or *Amalickiah* in the *Book of Mormon*; 2) It is an Akkadian word, brought over from Assyria millenia before the present era.

Broome should be applauded for his enthusiasm in searching for the truth of the origin of the name *America,* but there is much more research required by him and others before any one of the theories could be deemed to be the true one. We need more scholars like Keniston and Selma Barkham, who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, discovered valuable Basque records in Spain in reference to whaling and gathering whale oil in the 1400s in the Gulf of St. Lawrence area. More primary research is required in European libraries and archives to uncover pertinent records relating to the earliest European history, cartography, and toponymy in the Western Hemisphere. For me, I hope that sufficient proofs will be discovered to recognize without doubt that the credits solely rest with John Cabot and the Bristol merchant Richard Amerike. God bless America.

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