

*The Name Game: Cultural Modernization and First Names.* Jurgen Gerhards. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005. ISBN 0-7658-0297-X Cloth). 150 pp., \$34.95.

The title of this book transported me back to the 1960s and the popular song by Shirley Ellis. This initial pop culture reminiscence serves nicely as a preparation for Jurgen Gerhards's cultural analysis of the naming process. As I worked my way through the text, I found that my time investment was well rewarded. This reward included numerous micro-level insights, which Gerhards liberally sprinkles throughout his text. In addition, I also harvested solid macro-level cultural insights. The research to support the text's thesis is performed in Germany. I found myself instinctively transferring the methodology and conclusions to my American context. Readers from other nations will no doubt also experience this same ease of transference. This text, at 150 pages, provides the willing reader with a solid cultural analysis as well as with an insightful study of the various social structures that influence parents as they choose a name for their child.

Gerhards's thesis is that name changes are an indicator of cultural change: "macro-cultural developments are reflected in the micro-phenomenon of first names" (11). Positioning himself against the "cultural turn" school of sociology, Gerhards follows a Durkheimian approach to his study. That which appears personal and idiosyncratic is, in reality, socially structured. Early on, the reader is introduced to the German towns of Grimma and Gerolstein. Their birth and naming records serve as the control device and the evidence to verify Gerhards's theoretical claims. The research is solidly grounded.

The reader embarks with Gerhards on his journey to substantiate his thesis. This journey begins with the exploration of the traditional tripartite matrix within which

meaning is made and behavior studied: religion, nationalism, and family. The author provides chapter-length analysis of each element. One is not surprised to read that the Christian tradition dominated the cultural frame of reference in Germany for centuries and that the majority of first names were chosen from the ranks of saints, especially the martyrs. However, the secularizing tendencies of a developing economy and advances in education resulted in a decline in Christian names. Referring to Marx's view, Gerhards states: "[A]s earthly happiness waxes, the importance of religion wanes" (28).

It is within this study of the influence of religion on naming that we find an example of the insightful nature of Gerhards's work. He appropriately recognizes that the term "Christian" in Germany is ambiguous. He distinguishes Protestantism from Catholicism and asks whether there are significant differences between the two major Christian groups in Germany. Reformation theology diminished the role of the saints, resulting in Protestant parents' more often choosing a biblical name than a saint's name for their child. By contrast, counter-reformation Catholicism prescribed that children must be named after saints. The Protestant dictum "thou shalt not name children after saints" becomes the Catholic command "thou shalt name children after saints." This secularizing tendency with regard to first names has continued throughout the twentieth century.

Gerhards's analysis of nationalism piqued my interest. I wanted to see how he would deal with the Nazi experience in Germany. With characteristic clarity and simplicity, Gerhards neutrally points out how the growing nationalistic tendencies within the Germany of the late nineteenth century resulted in the rise in names connected to German culture. This nationalizing process intensified during the period of National Socialism, culminating in the 1937 law commanding that all "'German ethnic comrades' call each other by German names" (45). However, with the German defeat in World War

II, the post-war period witnessed a discrediting of all things German, including German names. Gerhards notes that the decline in the influence of religion and nationalism mirrors a similar decline in the tendency of parents to name a child after other family members as a way of reinforcing family bonds.

But if religion, nationalism and the family are not major influences on parents in their name-choosing decision, then what factors are? Gerhards skillfully argues for two major positive influences: the rise of the individual and globalization. Each of these social processes is studied at chapter-length. Each chapter contains interesting and useful data, not only for the sociology expert. The lay reader will come away with a solid and comprehensive analysis of two of the major social processes which influence our lives and our world today. For example, we learn of the growing importance of the process of individuation over the last century. As the twentieth century progressed, more and more parents wished to individuate their children by giving them less popular names.

A significant contribution Gerhards makes in his analysis of individuation concerns the question of social classes. He hypothesizes that first names may indicate social class, and he provides evidence showing that lower class parents tend to pick names of mass cultural figures such as sports heroes, while higher class parents are more likely to choose names from Greek mythology, which may indicate a higher level of education. The twentieth century shows no evidence of decreasing social and cultural stratification, but rather an intensified and sedimented stratification.

The second major social influence on naming in the late twentieth century is globalization. With regard to names, Gerhards insightfully argues that the concept of globalization is best understood in the sense of "transnationalization." A study of the data reveals that during the second half of the twentieth century, German parents chose more and more

names of foreign origin. These foreign names chosen were generally from French, Italian, and Anglo-American cultures. Gerhards describes this as a process of "occidentalization" of naming. Interestingly, this process developed in both East and West Germany: political division did not result in name-preference division. The introduction and proliferation of mass media, especially the television and music recordings, exposed Germany to Western culture after World War II. It followed as an unintentional byproduct that the German name pool would experience a Westernization as well.

The final major component to Gerhards's analysis of his thesis concerns sex and gender, and whether social changes in these categories have significant impact on the naming process. Here again, he provides insightful clarifications which are useful to all readers. He accepts the usual distinction of sex as the biological level and gender as the social role expectations of males and females. However, he adds the concept of "'sex category,'... the social construction of male and female" (102). Clothes are markers; first names are life-long markers. Gerhards offers an instructive contrast between the United States and Germany in this regard. While Americans enjoy an almost absolute freedom to name their children whatever they please, in Germany the State (as public guardian of the good of the child) restricts parents in their name-choices. A child cannot be given: (1) the same name as a sibling; (2) an offensive name; and, (3) a non gender-specific name (103). Gerhards finds that German names are no more androgynous in 1990 than they were in 1950 (109).

The relationship that Gerhards finds with respect to sex is that parents tend to name their male children with more traditional names while female children tend to be given more fashionable and more foreign names. Even though gender roles have changed in many areas of society, this tendency to change has not penetrated the naming process: "gender-specific names have proven resistant to these socially transforming processes" (114). One observes this rigidity in

the German law which provides that if one undergoes a sex-change operation, that person must also undergo a name change (115).

Gerhards's research leads him to conclude that even though parents seem quite free to choose a name for their child, there are strong social structuring processes at work in this decision. Religion, nationalism, and family ties have functioned as ligatures to structure the naming process. However, when these three structures decrease in importance, what fills the void? Gerhards argues that the individuating and transnationalizing processes have become more and more significant in structuring the name-giving decision. While parents are often unaware of any forces acting on them in their deciding on a name, "society's impact is decisive" (123).

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**These Are the Names.** Studies in Jewish Onomastics. Vol. 4. In Honor of Prof. Edwin D. Lawson on his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Edited by Aaron Demsky. Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press. 2003. Pp. 349 + 119. ISBN 965-226-267-6.

In his introduction, the eminent scholar Aaron Demsky, Professor of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, states that these studies have been dedicated "to the eminent onomastician Edwin David Lawson, whose encouragement and wise counsel over the past decade have contributed significantly to the recognition of the subject of Jewish names as an academic field of Jewish studies" (p. 9). Editor Demsky came to know Dr. Lawson when he proposed to the late Avraham Stahl the creation of a center for Jewish onomastics. Within this context, it was, of course, natural that Professor Lawson's name immediately came up. With regard to Professor Lawson's scholarship, the late Dr. Stahl is quoted as

saying that Ed Lawson "knew everything about the science of onomastics and . . . had done so much to raise the academic standards in that field" (p. 9).

Professor Demsky notes that this volume consists of four parts: (1) heartfelt tributes to Dr. Lawson by three of his colleagues; (2) seven articles in English; (3) an article on Jewish names by Dr. Lawson himself; and (4) five papers in Hebrew. The articles are abstracted in the opposite languages, and the indices appear in the Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic alphabets of the names mentioned in the body of the articles themselves.

In Chapter 1 ("Ed Lawson – The Man and the Scholar"), the late Donald M. Lance who passed away suddenly on October 23, 2002, a close friend of Dr. Lawson, provides highlights of Professor Lawson's noteworthy life. Born on December 23, 1923, he enrolled at the University of Illinois in 1942 after graduation from high school. He was soon called into military service, and as a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps he served with distinction in World War II and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Purple Heart. After his honorable discharge, Professor Lawson returned to Illinois to continue his studies. While there, he met his wife Irene Kentner, whom he married in 1949. Professor Lance's tribute points out that Dr. Lawson changed his name from Edwin David Levin to Edwin David Lawson in order to combat anti-Semitic attitudes of the time that limited his ability to gain entry into many universities (p. 15). Professor Lawson graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a doctorate in social psychology and personality. After teaching at several institutions including SUNY at Albany (1954-1963), he became Chair of the Department of Psychology in 1967 at the State University of New York at Fredonia, and where he remained as a distinguished scholar and teacher until his retirement in 1989. To be sure, the word "retirement" is inappropriate in Professor Lawson's case because he has become even more active in the

area of onomastics since 1989, as his presence at the various conferences in our profession and his frequent scholarly contributions attest. In fact, I saw Dr. Lawson in May of 2004 at the annual meeting of the Canadian Learned Societies in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Professor Lance comments at length on Professor Lawson's scholarly achievements. These include an enviable publication record (see the complete listing on pp. 27-40, with the first publication in 1954) not only in onomastics but also in the area of psychology known as "semantic differential" pioneered by the late Charles Osgood at the University of Illinois. Professor Lawson's professional goal has always been to make accessible the work of his colleagues in onomastics to a wider audience. His two major reference works on names (1987, 1995) and his numerous scholarly articles, many of which have been published in this journal, do just that. Professor Lance correctly states that "Ed has made his indelible mark on onomastics in various capacities: as president of the American Name Society [1995-1996]; as a member of the editorial boards of *Names*, *Onomastica Canadiana*, and *Nomina Africana*, and the Program Committee of 1999 and 2002 International Congress on Onomastic Sciences" (p. 19).

The following chapter ("Ed Lawson's Contributions to Onomastics") by Edward Callary, former editor of this journal, points out that Dr. Lawson served with distinction as President of the American Name Society (1995-1996). Callary notes that Professor Lawson wrote in 2001 that he had four major personal and professional goals for his beloved American Name Society and the study of names: "to make onomastics more professional and more respected as a discipline; to develop resources for the study of names; to encourage research in previously underresearched areas; and to publish the CIA papers on names" (p. 22). To be sure, Professor has already accomplished his first three objectives,

and he is currently hard at work on the fourth as many of us know. Professor Callary states, "Ed has given more than 30 years to onomastics, as a scholar, administrator, promoter, archivist, advisor to many and friend to all. Since I have come to the end of my brief encomium, it is time to sum Ed Lawson's contributions to onomastics. This I can do quite sincerely and quite succinctly: he was the right man in the right place at the right time, and he moved onomastics in the right direction" (p. 24).

Chapter 3 ("Edwin Lawson and ICOS") by André Lapierre details Professor Lawson's contributions to the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences. Lapierre states that, with regard to ICOS, "[Edwin D. Lawson's] contributions to have not only been appreciated but they have also helped to enhance the very structure of the congresses by facilitating exchanges of views and information" (p. 26).

Chapter 4 ("List of Publications") by Edwin D. Lawson contains an enumeration of Professor Lawson's scholarly contributions during his lifetime. Given Dr. Lawson's ongoing commitment to onomastic research, the list will continue to grow with each passing year. As impressive as this list is, it fails to capture Edwin D. Lawson the man. I have had the privilege of knowing Dr. Lawson for more than a dozen years. During that period, we have had very pleasant face-to-face meetings at professional meetings, and via email and regular mail. He has always sought to help me, and everyone he knows, professionally in every conceivable way. He is the consummate professional colleague, the person that you want to have in your own department.

The fourth chapter ("Methodological Principles for Determining Etymologies of Ashkenazic Given Names"), which forms the first chapter of the second part of this book, is by Alexander Beider. An abbreviated version of the author's introduction to his book on the same topic (Beider, 2001), this lengthy article provides an explicit set of parameters for onomastic principles on Ashkenazic given names.

Chapter 5 ("Naming Customs as an Indication of Assimilation: A Study of First Names in the Jewish Congregations of Stockholm and Malmö [1895-1921]") by Rita Bredefeldt demonstrates a resourceful and inventive use of socio-onomastic research to study assimilation patterns in Sweden.

The sixth chapter ("Some Reflections on the Names of the Jews of Kaifeng, China") by editor Demsky examines naming patterns in a Chinese Jewish community. A precise arrival date of Jews in Kaifeng, China, is impossible to determine with certitude, though the Jewish community appears to date to the twelfth century. Demsky examines three aspects of names: (1) The communal name "The Sect of the Pluckers of the Sinews"; (2) Chinese surnames; and (3) Non-Chinese personal names.

In chapter 7 ("Jewish Names on the Map of Birobidzhan"), Boris Kotlerman uses toponyms as a means to determine governmental policy towards the Jews of Birobidzhan in the Soviet Far East in 1928. The toponyms of that area resulted from the special situation of that area as Jewish Autonomous Region. The author outlines four separate periods in its toponymic history: (1) 1928-1930; (2) 1931-1934; (3) 1935-1936; and (4) since 1937.

In chapter 8 ("Biblical Names in the Toponymy of Missouri"), Donald Lance makes a second contribution to this volume. In this study, the late Professor Lance examines Biblical place names in Missouri and provides a thorough analysis of the 109 names with an appendix that indicates frequency of occurrence in Missouri and the U.S. This study is significant because it provides insights into the changing naming practices in this country.

The ninth chapter ("Jewish Names and the Names of Jews") by Stanley Lieberon contains an enlightening account of naming trends in twentieth-century Jewry, especially in

comparison to naming patterns among non-Jews. The author bases his study on solid empirical research.

Chapter 10 ("The *Laqab* of Bukharan Jews") by Chana Talmas is a study of nicknames among Bukharan (Central Asian Republics) Jews. *Laqab* is an unofficial nickname that follows the first name, and is bestowed upon men and women. The function of these nicknames is to distinguish among people with otherwise identical names. Bukharan *laqabs* may be classified by appearance, manner, and character, occupation, social status, and place of origin.

The last chapter written in English ("Some Jewish Personal Names – 2: An Annotated Bibliography") and the third part of this volume, by Edwin D. Lawson, is a continuation of his two indispensable volumes on names studies (Lawson 1987, 1995). The bibliography forms the core of this volume because it is by the person whom this volume honors and because it represents the type of onomastic research that Professor Lawson does so well. This 161-page chapter, with its 620 entries together with Dr. Lawson's (1997) previous annotated bibliography on Jewish names, ought to be published as a separate volume together with any new references encountered by Professor Lawson. Such a volume would thus make this invaluable information available in a single source. The present annotated bibliography continues Dr. Lawson's precise, accurate and factual account of the studies included.

The fourth and final section of this book contains five essays on Jewish names written in Hebrew. English abstracts for the section written in Hebrew appear on pp. 337-340 and we will now discuss them here.

In the first chapter of this section ("Rabbi Yose the Tanna and Rabbi Yose Ben Halafta"), Tal Ilan proposes an onomastic solution for the identification of Rabbi Yose by proposing, based on her analysis of the textual evidence, that this is two different men.

Chapter 2 ("Personal Names of Salonikan Jewry in Recent Generations According to Marriage Certificates and Gravestones") by Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky uses onomastic data to assess the following factors among Salonikan Jews: "a. The ethnic character of the names; b. The socioreligious message of the names; c. The prevalence of the names in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; d. The character, expression and popularity of men's and women's names; and e. The use and character of nicknames" (p. 337).

The third chapter ("The Name Riddles in the Poetry of Anatoly bar Yosef") by Elisheva HaCohen is a study of the Hebrew poetry of Moorish Spain (tenth to the twelfth centuries) in which a riddle finds its solution in the name of the person honored by the poem.

The penultimate chapter ("The Hero's Name as a Literary Device in the Talmudic Story in Gender Contexts: The Case of Mar 'Uqba' [TB Ketubot 67b]") by Admiel Kosman addresses the relationship of naming and charitable donations in a specific Talmudic tale together with a discussion of the anonymity of women and the aggrandizement of men.

In the final chapter ("The Esoteric Meaning of Hebrew Names According to Rabbi Elijah of Vilna [Gra]"), Yosef Rivlin offers a study of the etymology of names according to Rabbi Elijah of Vilna. This chapter examines the Rabbi's kabbalistic etymology of names, and the role of redemption in his onomastic commentary.

With its contributions by such preeminent scholars, this *hommage* volume to Dr. Edwin D. Lawson on the occasion of his eightieth birthday is a fitting tribute to him as an outstanding and continuing scholar. While we all recognize his achievements during a distinguished career, it is important not to lose sight of him as a compassionate, generous, and benevolent human being. Everyone who has the good fortune to know him can relate stories about the human and personable side of Dr. Lawson. The photograph of Professor

Lawson is a remarkable likeness and it captures his scholarly and humanitarian aspects (p. 3).

## References

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