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Guest Editorial

ALLEEN PACE NILSEN and DON L. F. NILSEN
Arizona State University, USA

We volunteered to serve as guest editors for this special issue focusing on ethnic influences on names and naming because we were impressed at the quality and the variety of ethnic-related papers that were presented at the 2007 American Name Society meeting in Anaheim, California. A second reason is that over the last decade as we have read the news, observed discussions, and participated in various studies, we have begun to wonder if virtually all personal naming is not influenced by one's ethnicity. After all, names are created to identify individuals, and if ethnicity is defined broadly to include one's family, one's socio-linguistic status, and one's religion, then in matters of personal identification ethnicity comes second only to the matter of gender. While we were in the process of editing the papers for this issue, we heard two news stories about names and religion. One was about a kindergarten teacher in Sudan being jailed because she had named a teddy bear Mohammad. The other was about the Mormon Church using volunteer typists to prepare the millions of names that they have in their genealogy files so that they can be made accessible online.

Here is a sampling of other events that over the last decade have made us pay attention to the many ways that ethnicity plays a role in the names that people create for themselves and for their children, as well as for places, and in one instance, even for a newly discovered disease.

Flat Earth Influences: In today's flat earth where jet travel and instant communication are wiping out borders between countries and groups, ethnic-based naming may be one of the last borders to fall. In the past, most Americans have used our own naming system as a benchmark from which to judge the peculiarities of 'foreign' systems. But now that we are forced to deal with many people who have not grown up in the United States we are beginning to realize that our system too has its peculiarities. We just talked to a man who wanted help for the next time he is challenged by an airport security checker who does not understand why his passport says *William* while his ticket says *Bill*. We have also talked to several married women who have kept their original surnames but find themselves on the defensive when they enroll their children in school or attend social events with their husbands. And we laughed right along with the rest of the audience when we heard Jeff Valdez, a Hispanic comedian explain:

> My older brothers' names are Alfonso, Lorenzo, Ramon — and me, Jeff. I guess that was right about the time my parents assimilated . . . right there!

We laughed because Valdez so succinctly pointed to the way that names do more than identify people; they tell intriguing stories. We first noticed this when we saw how

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efficiently contemporary authors communicate the ethnic concerns they are writing about when they use distinctive names in such book titles as Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and John Nichols's *The Milagro Beanfield War*.

Name Changing: A couple of generations ago when people who aspired to be famous in America changed their names, their desire was usually to appear more 'American', as when actor David Daniel Kaminsky adopted the name of Danny Kaye, dancer Frederick Austerlitz changed to Fred Astaire, actress and singer Doris von Kappelhoff changed to Doris Day, and singer and comedian Andrew Clay Silverstein changed to Andrew Dice Clay. But today people are going the other way and choosing names to distinguish themselves or to honor their ethnicity. When television personality Geraldo Rivera first graduated from law school and was working as an attorney in New York City he went under the anglicized name of Jerry Rivers, but when he went into show business he decided that the Hispanic version of his name would attract more attention. When an aspiring African American comedian converted to Judaism, she changed her name from Caryn Johnson to Whoopi Goldberg, and when Chad Rowan, who grew up in Oahu, Hawaii, became the first American to win the Japanese sumo wrestling championship, he changed his name to Akebono so as to fit better in his sport. Boxer Cassius Clay and basketball player Lew Alcinder were among the first celebrities to do this when they converted and took the Muslim names of Mohammed Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabar, respectively. For his first American movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger's agent convinced him he should go under the stage name of Arnold Strong. The agent's reasoning was that Americans could not pronounce such a name as Schwarzenegger, but the ambitious young body builder argued, 'They will learn!'

Names from Other Parts of the World: Because the United States was mostly settled by immigrants from Europe and the British Isles and because until fairly recently these were the countries that Americans associated with, most of us feel fairly comfortable with names that follow English and European patterns, but we have been slow to learn about names in other parts of the world. When the Name Society met in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2006, we were surprised to learn that the city has an Arabic name and that the *Al* part of it is the same as the *al* in *Al-qaeda*. It simply means 'the' and is also seen in such mathematical terms as *algebra* and *algorithm*, concepts borrowed from Arabic at about the same time that we started using Arabic, rather than Roman, numerals. How hard it is for Americans to learn and remember naming details from non-European names was demonstrated after the Virginia Tech shootings in April of 2007. These occurred eight years to the week after the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. Most Americans still remember the names of the two Colorado shooters — Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold — but few speakers use the name of the of the 23-year-old shooter at Virginia Tech, whose name variously appeared in news stories as Cho Seung-Hui, Seung-Hui Cho, and Cho Seung Hui.

E-mail and the Internet: Here in Arizona during 2003 and 2004, Arizona residents were involved in a controversy over the renaming of Squaw Peak (the most visited tourist site in the Phoenix area) to Piestewa Peak, in commemoration of the life of

Lori Piestewa, the first woman and an Arizona Native American to be killed in combat in Iraq. See Wendy Kelleher's article, 'A Contemporary Public Naming Controversy in Phoenix, Arizona: The Changing Social Perspectives on Landmark Nomenclature' in the June 2004 issue of *Names*. One of the turning points in what became a major political battle was the fact that the Governor's Office received positive e-mails about the new name from leaders of each of the dozen Native American tribes located in the state.

An earlier, but less publicized, case of Native Americans using e-mail to organize a protest and influence a naming decision occurred in 1993 when the Federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, announced that it was naming a newly discovered disease *Four Corners Hantavirus* 'in honor' of the area of its discovery on the Navajo reservation near the spot where Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico meet. Protests from Native Americans were both timely and effective. The Center then announced the name would be *Muerto Canyon Hantavirus*, but again the name was found offensive because the nearby *Muerto* (Spanish for 'the dead') Canyon had been the site of a Navajo massacre. In June of 1994, the Center said it would use the name *Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome* for the disease, which by then had killed forty-two people in eighteen states. The hantavirus family of diseases is named for the Hantaan River in South Korea, where the first strain was discovered when it infected 3,000 American soldiers during the Korean War.

As this sampling shows, there are so many different ways that names are influenced by ethnicity, that the subject could have been a focus topic for a whole year of *Names* journals rather than just one issue, but for practical reasons we had to settle on a single issue. We like the way that Lindsey Chen's article on the names created by Carl Barks for Walt Disney's *Uncle $crooge* comic books reveals how readers are affected by names at an almost subconscious level. We also like the way that Cynthia Lyles-Scott reveals insights into slave naming as exhibited in Toni Morrison's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *Beloved*, and the way that Karen Kow Yip Cheng tackles the complexities of personal naming in the multilingual-multicultural country of Malaysia. We also think readers will be interested in the way that Bertie Neethling explained the political and personal complexities of name choice for Xhosa speakers in South Africa. Karen Sands-O'Connor presents an insightful study of the subtle messages communicated by character names in British children's literature set in the West Indies.

Something new we have done in this issue is to devote occasional pages to short notes, which we hope will serve as breathers between the longer articles and might also inspire readers to further research on the topics that are mentioned. We asked Anjanette Darrington, one of our graduating Ph.D. students, to tell a little about her research on naming processes in children's literature. We also asked Cleveland Evans, immediate past president of The American Name Society, to contribute the answer he made to an Associated Press inquiry about ethnicity and current naming patterns, and we asked Frank Nuessel, the incoming editor of *Names: A Journal of Onomastics,* to contribute comments on the subject of ethnophaulisms and hate speech."

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and will be inspired to think creatively and to contribute your own ideas to the incoming editor Frank Nuessel, professor of linguistics at the University of Louisville.