

The Name Game: Cultural Modernization and First Names. Jürgen 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 Jürgen 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

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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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