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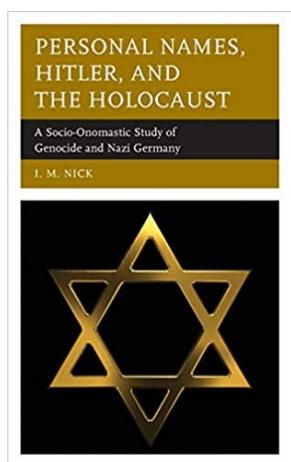
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(<https://www.amazon.com/Personal-Names-Hitler-Holocaust-Socio-Onomastic/dp/1498525970>)

Dr. I. M. Nick is the author of this extremely significant volume on the use and abuse of personal names during the ghastly and hideous years of Hitler’s genocidal plan to eliminate the Jews who served as scapegoats for his grotesque view of the world.

Dr. Nick enjoys a well-deserved international reputation for her scholarship in onomastics. She served as President of the American Name Society (2015–2018), and, since 2019, she has been Editor-in-Chief of *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, the official publication of the American Name Society. Her academic credentials are impeccable. She holds a Ph.D. in English linguistics from the University of Freiburg, and an MA in German linguistics (University of Washington, Seattle), a BA in Germanic languages and Literature (University of Maryland), a BSc in clinical and social psychology (University of Maryland), and an MSc in forensic and investigative psychology (University of Liverpool), all with university and departmental honors. Finally, she was awarded the prestigious German post-doctoral degree of the “Habilitation” for her research in English linguistics (University of Cologne), which represents the highest level of scholarly achievement in Germany.

To be sure, countless scholarly books and articles have been written about the Holocaust. However, this is the first one that focuses on the how personal names played a significant role in the Nazi plan to exterminate an entire group of people from the face of the earth. This book reveals how names

¹ Frank Nuessel wrote an entirely different review of this book, which was published in *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* in 2019 (volume 67(4): 231–235).

served as signifiers to identify those whom Hitler and his minions set out to eliminate. In a certain ironic twist, some of the perpetrators of this atrocity later used the names of their victims as a means of escaping justice after Germany lost the war in 1945.

In her prefatory statement, Dr. Nick offers several observations about her approach to this topic. First, her research is “an exploration of names and naming immediately before, during and after the Holocaust” (xiii). Second, her approach is qualitative rather than quantitative because of her “profound respect and concern for the millions of people who had their identities and names stolen and replaced with serial digits during the Holocaust. It is also out of profound respect and concern for the people today whose lives have been, are, or will be threatened by a different genocide” (xiii). Finally, “the namestories shared here are embedded within a historical examination of naming laws, policies, and practices that were significant for the preparation and execution of the atrocities perpetrated during the Holocaust. In addition, this work examines the ways in which similar naming practices have been used in several contemporary genocides” (xiv).

The nine chapters in this book address different onomastic aspects of the Holocaust. Chapter 1 (“Names, Naming, National Security, and Personal Liberty in the United States”) opens with a discussion of how the United States government monitors individuals through insidious technical strategies. In this chapter, Dr. Nick demonstrates how officials can utilize onomastic techniques to identify and target specific groups of people in order to victimize them. This potential misuse of anthroponomy is a devious and questionable governmental practice, which requires constant monitoring by a responsible citizenry.

In chapter 2 (“The National Socialist Policy of Onomastic Apartheid”), Dr. Nick points out that surnames came into being in Europe during the late eighteenth century. At that time, the Jewish population of central Europe traditionally used only forenames. However, in Austria Jews had to assume a surname. Refusal to comply could result in the government imposing a derisory and demeaning surname upon them. During the Third Reich, the practice of forcing onomastic legislation upon Jewish residents continued, for example, in the form of a 1938 law known as LAFFN-2 (Law for the Alteration of Family and First Names-2). This dictum required that all Jews add the name *Sara(h)* (female) or *Israel* (male) to their personal names. Dr. Nick illustrates with specific cases the way in which the Nazis then used these mandatory personal names to identify Jewish residents for the purpose of perpetrating their program of *Endlösung* (‘the final solution’) to exterminate the Jewish population.

The third chapter (“National Socialist Practices for Naming the Power Elite”) discusses the Nazi Heinrich Himmler’s plan for creating a perfect “master race” through the *Lebensborn* (‘spring of life’) program. Alongside the systematic elimination of “undesirables”, the Nazis sought to promote the

propagation of a perfect stock of people who were prototypes of Aryan perfection. Children identified as personifying this Aryan ideal were commonly given personal names that reflected Germanic virtues and heroes, i.e., male children “should be given German names connected with heroic battle, courage, bravery, victory, and ferocity; and female children receive German names related to chastity, honor, feminine pride, and dignity” (p. 97).

In the following chapter (“The Hunt for Sara(h) and Israel”), Dr. Nick describes in detail, how the Third Reich’s requirement that all Jewish residents use the names *Sara(h)* or *Israel* was used to target their victims. These names, for example, were required to be posted in all public records including telephone books. The government policed this legal prerequisite, and fines and/or prison sentences were issued for non-compliance. The publicization of this onomastic information also allowed private citizens who were designated as Aryan to identify and humiliate Jewish citizens (137). Throughout this chapter, Dr. Nick provides numerous cases in which people were made to experience unimaginable suffering as a direct result of this law (LAFN-2). Thus, this chapter demonstrates how completely the Nazi onomastic laws infiltrated daily life during the Third Reich and how it facilitated the Holocaust.

The fifth chapter (“Denazification in Name Only?”) concentrates on the aftermath of WW-II in Europe. Specifically, the allied nations eliminated the discriminatory edicts of National Socialism, e.g., “German and Austrian officials were ordered to remove the compulsory onomastic markers from all governmental records; and to report back to the responsible Allied officials that this order had been carried out” (169). In reaction to the Nuremberg Trials, which began in 1945, many of those culpable for the atrocities committed during the Holocaust changed their names to escape prosecution. As Dr. Nick details, in a very controversial post WW-II move, the West German government offered amnesty to those residents who had assumed aliases to avoid hearings before tribunals. Only 250 Nazis sought reprieve under this proclamation.

In the next chapter (“Names and Aliases of Male War Criminals”), Dr. Nick examines the onomastic strategies employed by male Nazi war criminals to disguise their identities. Three distinct methods were employed: (1) an alias totally distinct from the original birth name; (2) a forename was altered and the last name retained; (3) a forename was retained and the last name was altered. To illustrate each of these strategies, Dr. Nick provides appalling accounts of crimes committed by former Nazis, who used these alias formation strategies to avoid criminal prosecution. In addition, she describes the system of cryptic pseudonyms the Nazi employees utilized in the killing centers to disguise their identities as the committed their daily acts of mass murder.

In the middle of the book, there are nine unpaginated pages (between chapters 6 and 7), which contain photographs of the Hohehorst Lebensborn Facility (See chapter 3). The remaining six pages contain photographs of Holocaust survivors interviewed for this volume (See chapter 8).

Chapter 7 (Names and Aliases of Female Nazi War Criminals”) deals with female Nazi war criminals separately. As Dr. Nick points out, many women were complicit in the Holocaust in their roles as administrative assistants (typists, stenographers, telephonists, etc.) by helping to maintain the system of National Socialism and conceal the atrocious crimes perpetrated throughout the Third Reich. Moreover, many thousands of women participated directly in the torture and mass murder, for example, as matrons in concentration camps. Dr. Nick catalogues the techniques that these women used to change their names and elude legal retribution for their crimes. Their name changes differed from the aliases chosen by their male counterparts as many were able to hide their identity through legal name changes. The chapter also provides details about the secret names used by camp prisoners for their female guards and the attempts of the post-war governments to find the female perpetrators who once carried these nicknames.

Chapter 8 (“Namesakes of Shoah Survivors”) consists of Dr. Nick’s interviews with Shoah survivors whose family photographs appear in the unpaginated pages at the center of this volume. This is one of the most moving chapters of the book because it shows the indomitable spirit of these survivors and their bravery in withstanding the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. Each of the personal stories in this chapter ends with personalized dedications in which the survivors name those family members who lost their lives during the Holocaust.

In the final chapter (“Naming, Names and Recovering Identities”), Dr. Nick uses a fabricated set of biographical records to illustrate the procedures employed by experts today to identify the Holocaust victims. As this chapter shows discrepancies in these historical documents can present significant challenges in identifying those lost. The techniques to overcome such obstacles are described with the help of interviews Dr. Nick conducted with onomastic experts from some of the world’s leading organizations for Holocaust remembrance (e.g. the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem). In this chapter, Dr. Nick also includes in-depth interviews with relatives of infamous Nazis Heinrich Himmler, Hans Frank, and Amön Goth (the concentration camp commander featured in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and discusses the impact of having the name of perpetrator.

This is not an easy book to read because it recounts the absolute horror of the Holocaust. Challenging books such as this one, however, must be read. Moreover, their content must be remembered lest similar acts of systematic government-sponsored genocide occur again. We must never forget the past for as the Spanish philosopher George Santayana (1883–1952) reminds “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.

The scholarship involved in writing this volume is multi-faceted. It includes scouring the detailed historical records of the Nazi régime, conducting personal interviews with Holocaust survivors as well as the children of the

perpetrators of this monstrosity. Each chapter contains copious footnotes ranging in number from 25 (chapter 8) to 192 (chapter 6). Moreover, the References section (pp. 423–449) provide the reader with an indication of the depth and breadth of research involved in writing this book. The Subject Index (pp. 451–464) and the Name Index (pp. 465–469) offer an account of the topics covered in this outstanding research work. This is the one book that anyone who wants to learn about the Holocaust should read. This book is not only for scholars interested in researching this period. By presenting the personal stories of people who experienced this terrible period in the twentieth century, this work also appeals to non-scholars. It is the individual narratives that are the most moving. Dr. Nick succeeds admirably in writing a highly informative yet deeply sensitive onomastic account of the Holocaust. This is the best book that I have read in the past decade. It is a must read book for everyone.