Obsessive or not, any parent wants to believe that she is making a big difference in the kind of person her child turns out to be. Otherwise, why bother?

The belief in parental power is manifest in the first official act a parent commits: giving the baby a name. As any modern parent knows, the baby-naming industry is booming, as evidenced by a proliferation of books, websites, and baby-name consultants. Many parents seem to believe that a child cannot prosper unless it is hitched to the right name; names are seen to carry great aesthetic or even predictive powers.

This might explain why, in 1958, a New York City man named Robert Lane decided to call his baby son Winner. The Lanes, who lived in a housing project in Harlem, already had several children, each with a fairly typical name. But this boy—well, Robert Lane apparently had a special feeling about this one. Winner Lane: how could he fail with a name like that?
Three years later, the Lanes had another baby boy, their seventh and last child. For reasons that no one can quite pin down today, Robert decided to name this boy Loser. It doesn’t appear that Robert was unhappy about the new baby; he just seemed to get a kick out of the name’s bookend effect. First a Winner, now a Loser. But if Winner Lane could hardly be expected to fail, could Loser Lane possibly succeed?

Loser Lane did in fact succeed. He went to prep school on a scholarship, graduated from Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, and joined the New York Police Department (this was his mother’s longtime wish), where he made detective and, eventually, sergeant. Although he never hid his name, many people were uncomfortable using it. “So I have a bunch of names,” he says today, “from Jimmy to James to whatever they want to call you. Timmy. But they rarely call you Loser.” Once in a while, he said, “they throw a French twist on it: ‘Losier.’ ” To his police colleagues, he is known as Lou.

And what of his brother with the can’t-miss name? The most noteworthy achievement of Winner Lane, now in his midforties, is the sheer length of his criminal record: nearly three dozen arrests for burglary, domestic violence, trespassing, resisting arrest, and other mayhem.

These days, Loser and Winner barely speak. The father who named them is no longer alive. Clearly he had the right idea—that naming is destiny—but he must have gotten the boys mixed up.

Then there is the recent case of Temptress, a fifteen-year-old girl whose misdeeds landed her in Albany County Family Court in New York. The judge, W. Dennis Duggan, had long taken note of the strange names borne by some offenders. One teenage boy, Amcher, had been named for the first thing his parents saw upon reaching the hospital: the sign for Albany Medical Center Hospital Emergency Room. But Duggan considered Temptress the most outrageous name he had come across.
“I sent her out of the courtroom so I could talk to her mother about why she named her daughter Temptress,” the judge later recalled. “She said she was watching The Cosby Show and liked the young actress. I told her the actress’s name was actually Tempestt Bledsoe. She said she found that out later, that they had misspelled the name. I asked her if she knew what ‘temptress’ meant, and she said she also found that out at some later point. Her daughter was charged with ungovernable behavior, which included bringing men into the home while the mother was at work. I asked the mother if she had ever thought the daughter was living out her name. Most all of this went completely over her head.”

Was Temptress actually “living out her name,” as Judge Duggan saw it? Or would she have wound up in trouble even if her mother had called her Chastity?*

It isn’t much of a stretch to assume that Temptress didn’t have ideal parents. Not only was her mother willing to name her Temptress in the first place, but she wasn’t smart enough to know what that word even meant. Nor is it so surprising, on some level, that a boy named Amcher would end up in family court. People who can’t be bothered to come up with a name for their child aren’t likely to be the best parents either.

So does the name you give your child affect his life? Or is it your life reflected in his name? In either case, what kind of signal does a child’s name send to the world—and most important, does it really matter?

As it happens, Loser and Winner, Temptress and Amcher were all black. Is this fact merely a curiosity or does it have something larger to say about names and culture?

* See note p. 227.
Every generation seems to produce a few marquee academics who advance the thinking on black culture. Roland G. Fryer Jr., the young black economist who analyzed the “acting white” phenomenon and the black-white test score gap, may be among the next. His ascension has been unlikely. An indifferent high-school student from an unstable family, he went to the University of Texas at Arlington on an athletic scholarship. Two things happened to him during college: he quickly realized he would never make the NFL or the NBA; and, taking his studies seriously for the first time in his life, he found he liked them. After graduate work at Penn State and the University of Chicago, he was hired as a Harvard professor at age twenty-five. His reputation for candid thinking on race was already well established.

Fryer’s mission is the study of black underachievement. “One could rattle off all the statistics about blacks not doing so well,” he says. “You can look at the black-white differential in out-of-wedlock births or infant mortality or life expectancy. Blacks are the worst-performing ethnic group on SATs. Blacks earn less than whites. They are still just not doing well, period. I basically want to figure out where blacks went wrong, and I want to devote my life to this.”

In addition to economic and social disparity between blacks and whites, Fryer had become intrigued by the virtual segregation of culture. Blacks and whites watch different television shows. (*Monday Night Football* is the only show that typically appears on each group’s top ten list; *Seinfeld*, one of the most popular sitcoms in history, never ranked in the top fifty among blacks.) They smoke different cigarettes. (Newports enjoy a 75 percent market share among black teenagers versus 12 percent among whites; the white teenagers are mainly smoking Marlboros.) And black parents give their children names that are starkly different from white children’s.

Fryer came to wonder: is distinctive black culture a cause of the economic disparity between blacks and whites or merely a reflection of it?
As with the ECLS study, Fryer went looking for the answer in a mountain of data: birth-certificate information for every child born in California since 1961. The data, covering more than sixteen million births, included standard items such as name, gender, race, birth-weight, and the parents’ marital status, as well as more telling factors about the parents: their zip code (which indicates socioeconomic status and a neighborhood’s racial composition), their means of paying the hospital bill (again, an economic indicator), and their level of education.

The California data prove just how dissimilarly black and white parents name their children. White and Asian-American parents, meanwhile, give their children remarkably similar names; there is some disparity between white and Hispanic-American parents, but it is slim compared to the black-white naming gap.

The data also show the black-white gap to be a recent phenomenon. Until the early 1970s, there was a great overlap between black and white names. The typical baby girl born in a black neighborhood in 1970 was given a name that was twice as common among blacks than whites. By 1980 she received a name that was twenty times more common among blacks. (Boys’ names moved in the same direction but less aggressively—probably because parents of all races are less adventurous with boys’ names than girls’.) Given the location and timing of this change—dense urban areas where Afro-American activism was gathering strength—the most likely cause of the explosion in distinctively black names was the Black Power movement, which sought to accentuate African culture and fight claims of black inferiority. If this naming revolution was indeed inspired by Black Power, it would be one of the movement’s most enduring remnants. Afros today are rare, dashikis even rarer; Black Panther founder Bobby Seale is best known today for peddling a line of barbecue products.

A great many black names today are unique to blacks. More than 40 percent of the black girls born in California in a given year receive
a name that not *one* of the roughly 100,000 baby white girls received that year. Even more remarkably, nearly 30 percent of the black girls are given a name that is unique among every baby, white and black, born that year in California. (There were also 228 babies named Unique during the 1990s alone, and 1 each of Uneek, Uneque, and Uneqqee.) Even among very popular black names, there is little overlap with whites. Of the 626 baby girls named Deja in the 1990s, 591 were black. Of the 454 girls named Precious, 431 were black. Of the 318 Shanices, 310 were black.

What kind of parent is most likely to give a child such a distinctively black name? The data offer a clear answer: an unmarried, low-income, undereducated teenage mother from a black neighborhood who has a distinctively black name herself. In Fryer’s view, giving a child a superblack name is a black parent’s signal of solidarity with the community. “If I start naming my kid Madison,” he says, “you might think, ‘Oh, you want to go live across the railroad tracks, don’t you?’ ” If black kids who study calculus and ballet are thought to be “acting white,” Fryer says, then mothers who call their babies Shanice are simply “acting black.”

The California study shows that many white parents send as strong a signal in the opposite direction. More than 40 percent of the white babies are given names that are at least four times more common among whites. Consider Connor and Cody, Emily and Abigail. In one recent ten-year stretch, each of these names was given to at least two thousand babies in California—fewer than 2 percent of them black.

So what are the “whitest” names and the “blackest” names?

The Twenty “Whitest” Girl Names

1. Molly
2. Amy
3. Claire
4. Emily
5. Katie
6. Madeline
7. Katelyn
8. Emma
9. Abigail
10. Carly
11. Jenna
12. Heather
13. Katherine
14. Caitlin
15. Kaitlin
16. Holly
17. Allison
18. Kaitlyn
19. Hannah
20. Kathryn

The Twenty “Blackest” Girl Names

1. Imani
2. Ebony
3. Shanice
4. Aaliyah
5. Precious
6. Nia
7. Deja
8. Diamond
9. Asia
10. Aliyah
11. Jada
12. Tierra
13. Tiara
14. Kiara
15. Jazmine
16. Jasmin
17. Jazmin
18. Jasmine
19. Alexus
20. Raven

The Twenty “Whitest” Boy Names

1. Jake
2. Connor
3. Tanner
4. Wyatt
5. Cody
6. Dustin
7. Luke
8. Jack
9. Scott
10. Logan
11. Cole
12. Lucas
13. Bradley
14. Jacob
15. Garrett
16. Dylan
So how does it matter if you have a very white name or a very black name? Over the years, a series of “audit studies” have tried to measure how people perceive different names. In a typical audit study, a researcher would send two identical (and fake) résumés, one with a traditionally white name and the other with an immigrant or minority-sounding name, to potential employers. The “white” résumés have always gleaned more job interviews.

According to such a study, if DeShawn Williams and Jake Williams sent identical résumés to the same employer, Jake Williams would be more likely to get a callback. The implication is that black-sounding names carry an economic penalty. Such studies are tantalizing but severely limited, for they can’t explain why DeShawn didn’t get the call. Was he rejected because the employer is a racist and is convinced that DeShawn Williams is black? Or did he reject him because “DeShawn” sounds like someone from a low-income, low-
education family? A résumé is a fairly undependable set of clues—a recent study showed that more than 50 percent of them contain lies—so “DeShawn” may simply signal a disadvantaged background to an employer who believes that workers from such backgrounds are undependable.

Nor do the black-white audit studies predict what might have happened in a job interview. What if the employer is racist, and if he unwittingly agreed to interview a black person who happened to have a white-sounding name—would he be any more likely to hire the black applicant after meeting face-to-face? Or is the interview a painful and discouraging waste of time for the black applicant—that is, an economic penalty for having a white-sounding name? Along those same lines, perhaps a black person with a white name pays an economic penalty in the black community; and what of the potential advantage to be gained in the black community by having a distinctively black name? But because the audit studies can’t measure the actual life outcomes of the fictitious DeShawn Williams versus Jake Williams, they can’t assess the broader impact of a distinctively black name.

Maybe DeShawn should just change his name.

People do this all the time, of course. The clerks in New York City’s civil court recently reported that name changes are at an all-time high. Some of the changes are purely, if bizarrely, aesthetic. A young couple named Natalie Jeremijenko and Dalton Conley recently renamed their four-year-old son Yo Xing Heyno Augustus Eisner Alexander Weiser Knuckles Jeremijenko-Conley. Some people change names for economic purposes: after a New York livery-cab driver named Michael Goldberg was shot in early 2004, it was reported that Mr. Goldberg was in fact an Indian-born Sikh who thought it advantageous to take a Jewish name upon immigrating to New York. Goldberg’s decision might have puzzled some people in show business circles, where it is a time-honored tradition to change Jewish names.
Thus did Issur Danielovitch become Kirk Douglas; thus did the William Morris Agency rise to prominence under its namesake, the former Zelman Moses.

The question is, would Zelman Moses have done as well had he not become William Morris? And would DeShawn Williams do any better if he called himself Jake Williams or Connor Williams? It is tempting to think so—just as it is tempting to think that a truckload of children’s books will make a child smarter.

Though the audit studies can’t be used to truly measure how much a name matters, the California names data can.

How? The California data included not only each baby’s vital statistics but information about the mother’s level of education, income and, most significantly, her own date of birth. This last fact made it possible to identify the hundreds of thousands of California mothers who had themselves been born in California and then to link them to their own birth records. Now a new and extremely potent story emerged from the data: it was possible to track the life outcome of any individual woman. This is the sort of data chain that researchers dream about, making it possible to identify a set of children who were born under similar circumstances, then locate them again twenty or thirty years later to see how they turned out. Among the hundreds of thousands of such women in the California data, many bore distinctively black names and many others did not. Using regression analysis to control for other factors that might influence life trajectories, it was then possible to measure the impact of a single factor—in this case, a woman’s first name—on her educational, income, and health outcomes.

So does a name matter?

The data show that, on average, a person with a distinctively black name—whether it is a woman named Imani or a man named DeShawn—does have a worse life outcome than a woman named
Molly or a man named Jake. But it isn’t the fault of their names. If two black boys, Jake Williams and DeShawn Williams, are born in the same neighborhood and into the same familial and economic circumstances, they would likely have similar life outcomes. But the kind of parents who name their son Jake don’t tend to live in the same neighborhoods or share economic circumstances with the kind of parents who name their son DeShawn. And that’s why, on average, a boy named Jake will tend to earn more money and get more education than a boy named DeShawn. A DeShawn is more likely to have been handicapped by a low-income, low-education, single-parent background. His name is an indicator—not a cause—of his outcome. Just as a child with no books in his home isn’t likely to test well in school, a boy named DeShawn isn’t likely to do as well in life.

And what if DeShawn had changed his name to Jake or Connor: would his situation improve? Here’s a guess: anybody who bothers to change his name in the name of economic success is—like the high-school freshmen in Chicago who entered the school-choice lottery—at least highly motivated, and motivation is probably a stronger indicator of success than, well, a name.

Just as the ECLS data answered questions about parenting that went well beyond the black-white test gap, the California names data tell a lot of stories in addition to the one about distinctively black names. Broadly speaking, the data tell us how parents see themselves—and, more significantly, what kind of expectations they have for their children.

Here’s a question to begin with: where does a name come from, anyway? Not, that is, the actual source of the name—that much is usually obvious: there’s the Bible, there’s the huge cluster of traditional English and Germanic and Italian and French names, there are
princess names and hippie names, nostalgic names and place names. Increasingly, there are brand names (Lexus, Armani, Bacardi, Timberland) and what might be called aspirational names. The California data show eight Harvards born during the 1990s (all of them black), fifteen Yales (all white), and eighteen Princetons (all black). There were no Doctors but three Lawyers (all black), nine Judges (eight of them white), three Senators (all white), and two Presidents (both black). Then there are the invented names. Roland G. Fryer Jr., while discussing his names research on a radio show, took a call from a black woman who was upset with the name just given to her baby niece. It was pronounced *shuh-TEED* but was in fact spelled “Shithead.” Or consider the twin boys OrangeJello and LemonJello, also black, whose parents further dignified their choice by instituting the pronunciations *a-RON-zhello* and *le-MON-zhello*.

OrangeJello, LemonJello, and Shithead have yet to catch on among the masses, but other names do. How does a name migrate through the population, and why? Is it purely a matter of zeitgeist, or is there some sensible explanation? We all know that names rise and fall and rise—witness the return of Sophie and Max from near extinction—but is there a discernible pattern to these movements?

The answer lies in the California data, and the answer is yes.

Among the most interesting revelations in the data is the correlation between a baby’s name and the parent’s socioeconomic status. Consider the most common female names found in middle-income white households versus low-income white households. (These and other lists to follow include data from the 1990s alone, to ensure a large sample that is also current.)

Most Common Middle-Income White Girl Names

1. Sarah
2. Emily
3. Jessica
4. Lauren
There is considerable overlap, to be sure. But keep in mind that these are the most common names of all, and consider the size of the data set. The difference between consecutive positions on these lists may represent several hundred or even several thousand children. So if Brittany is number five on the low-income list and number eighteen on the middle-income list, you can be assured that Brittany is a decidedly low-end name. Other examples are even more pronounced. Five names in each category don’t appear at all in the other category’s top twenty. Here are the top five names among high-end and low-end families, in order of their relative disparity with the other category:
Most Common High-End White Girl Names

1. Alexandra
2. Lauren
3. Katherine
4. Madison
5. Rachel

Most Common Low-End White Girl Names

1. Amber
2. Heather
3. Kayla
4. Stephanie
5. Alyssa

And for the boys:

Most Common High-End White Boy Names

1. Benjamin
2. Samuel
3. Jonathan
4. Alexander
5. Andrew

Most Common Low-End White Boy Names

1. Cody
2. Brandon
3. Anthony
Considering the relationship between income and names, and given the fact that income and education are strongly correlated, it is not surprising to find a similarly strong link between the parents’ level of education and the name they give their baby. Once again drawing from the pool of most common names among white children, here are the top picks of highly educated parents versus those with the least education:

**Most Common White Girl Names Among High-Education Parents**

1. Katherine
2. Emma
3. Alexandra
4. Julia
5. Rachel

**Most Common White Girl Names Among Low-Education Parents**

1. Kayla
2. Amber
3. Heather
4. Brittany
5. Brianna

**Most Common White Boy Names Among High-Education Parents**

1. Benjamin
2. Samuel
3. Alexander
4. John  
5. William  

Most Common White Boy Names Among Low-Education Parents  
1. Cody  
2. Travis  
3. Brandon  
4. Justin  
5. Tyler  

The effect is even more pronounced when the sample is widened beyond the most common names. Drawing from the entire California database, here are the names that signify the most poorly educated white parents.

The Twenty White Girl Names  
That Best Signify Low-Education Parents*  
(Average number of years of mother’s education in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>11.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>11.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misty</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>11.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabatha</td>
<td>11.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbie</td>
<td>11.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destinee</td>
<td>11.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>11.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazmine</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyanne</td>
<td>11.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britany</td>
<td>12.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td>12.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffanie</td>
<td>12.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashly</td>
<td>12.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonya</td>
<td>12.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>12.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandie</td>
<td>12.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandi</td>
<td>12.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With a minimum of 100 occurrences
If you or someone you love is named Cindy or Brenda and is over, say, forty, and feels that those names did not formerly connote a low-education family, you are right. These names, like many others, have shifted hard and fast of late. Some of the other low-education names are obviously misspellings, whether intentional or not, of more standard names. In most cases the standard spellings of the names—Tabitha, Cheyenne, Tiffany, Brittany, and Jasmine—also signify low education. But the various spellings of even one name can reveal a strong disparity:

Ten “Jasmines” in Ascending Order of Maternal Education

(Years of mother’s education in parentheses)

1. Jazmine (11.94)
2. Jazmyne (12.08)
3. Jazzmin (12.14)
4. Jazzmine (12.16)
5. Jasmyne (12.18)
6. Jasmina (12.50)
7. Jazmyn (12.77)
8. Jasmine (12.88)
9. Jasmin (13.12)
10. Jasmyn (13.23)

Here is the list of low-education white boy names. It includes the occasional misspelling (Micheal and Tylor), but more common is the nickname-as-proper-name trend.
The Twenty White Boy Names
That Best Signify Low-Education Parents*
(Year of mother’s education in parentheses)

1. Ricky (11.55) 11. Tommy (11.89)
2. Joey (11.65) 12. Tony (11.96)
5. Billy (11.69) 15. Randy (12.07)
7. Johnny (11.75) 17. Tylor (12.14)
8. Larry (11.80) 18. Terry (12.15)
10. Steve (11.84) 20. Harley (12.22)

* With a minimum of 100 occurrences

Now for the names that signify the highest level of parental education. These names don’t have much in common, phonetically or aesthetically, with the low-education names. The girls’ names are in most regards diverse, though with a fair share of literary and otherwise artful touches. A caution to prospective parents who are shopping for a “smart” name: remember that such a name won’t make your child smart; it will, however, give her the same name as other smart kids—at least for a while. (For a much longer and more varied list of girls’ and boys’ names, see p. 227)
The Twenty White Girl Names
That Best Signify High-Education Parents *
(Years of mother’s education in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lucienne</td>
<td>16.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Marie-Claire</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Glynnis</td>
<td>16.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adair</td>
<td>16.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Meira</td>
<td>16.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Beatrix</td>
<td>16.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Clementine</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Philippa</td>
<td>16.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Aviva</td>
<td>16.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flannery</td>
<td>16.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rotem</td>
<td>16.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Oona</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Atara</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Linden</td>
<td>15.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Waverly</td>
<td>15.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Zofia</td>
<td>15.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pascale</td>
<td>15.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eleanora</td>
<td>15.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Elika</td>
<td>15.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Neeka</td>
<td>15.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With a minimum of 10 occurrences

Now for the boys’ names that are turning up these days in high-education households. This list is particularly heavy on the Hebrew, with a noticeable trend toward Irish traditionalism.

The Twenty White Boy Names
That Best Signify High-Education Parents *
(Years of mother’s education in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dov</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Akiva</td>
<td>16.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sander</td>
<td>16.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yannick</td>
<td>16.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sacha</td>
<td>16.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Guillaume</td>
<td>16.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elon</td>
<td>16.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ansel</td>
<td>16.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yonah</td>
<td>16.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tor</td>
<td>16.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If many names on the above lists were unfamiliar to you, don’t feel bad. Even boys’ names—which have always been scarcer than girls’—have been proliferating wildly. This means that even the most popular names today are less popular than they used to be. Consider the ten most popular names given to black baby boys in California in 1990 and then in 2000. The top ten in 1990 includes 3,375 babies (18.7 percent of those born that year), while the top ten in 2000 includes only 2,115 (14.6 percent of those born that year).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Popular Black Boy Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Number of occurrences in parentheses)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Michael</td>
<td>1. Isaiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Christopher</td>
<td>2. Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anthony</td>
<td>3. Elijah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. James</td>
<td>5. Joshua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Robert</td>
<td>7. Christopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Justin</td>
<td>10. Justin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With a minimum of 10 occurrences
In the space of ten years, even the most popular name among black baby boys (532 occurrences for Michael) became far less popular (308 occurrences for Isaiah). So parents are plainly getting more diverse with names. But there’s another noteworthy shift in these lists: a very quick rate of turnover. Note that four of the 1990 names (James, Robert, David, and Kevin) fell out of the top ten by 2000. Granted, they made up the bottom half of the 1990 list. But the names that replaced them in 2000 weren’t bottom dwellers. Three of the new names—Isaiah, Jordan, and Elijah—were in fact numbers one, two, and three in 2000. For an even more drastic example of how quickly and thoroughly a name can cycle in and out of use, consider the ten most popular names given to white girls in California in 1960 and then in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Popular White Girl Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1960</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Susan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cynthia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Deborah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Linda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sandra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not a single name from 1960 remains in the top ten. But, you say, it’s hard to stay popular for forty years. So how about comparing
today’s most popular names with the top ten from only twenty years earlier?

## Most Popular White Girl Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jennifer</td>
<td>1. Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sarah</td>
<td>2. Hannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Melissa</td>
<td>3. Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jessica</td>
<td>4. Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Christina</td>
<td>5. Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Amanda</td>
<td>6. Lauren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Nicole</td>
<td>7. Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Michelle</td>
<td>8. Emma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Amber</td>
<td>10. Megan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A single holdover: Sarah. So where do these Emilys and Emmas and Laurens all come from? Where on earth did Madison come from? It’s easy enough to see that new names become very popular very fast—but why?

Let’s take another look at a pair of earlier lists. Here are the most popular names given to baby girls in the 1990s among low-income families and among families of middle income or higher.

## Most Common “High-End” White Girl Names in the 1990s

1. Alexandra
2. Lauren
3. Katherine
4. Madison
5. Rachel
Most Common “Low-End” White Girl Names in the 1990s

1. Amber
2. Heather
3. Kayla
4. Stephanie
5. Alyssa

Notice anything? You might want to compare these names with the “Most Popular White Girl Names” list on page 199, which includes the top ten overall names from 1980 and 2000. Lauren and Madison, two of the most popular “high-end” names from the 1990s, made the 2000 top ten list. Amber and Heather, meanwhile, two of the overall most popular names from 1980, are now among the “low-end” names.

There is a clear pattern at play: once a name catches on among high-income, highly educated parents, it starts working its way down the socioeconomic ladder. Amber and Heather started out as high-end names, as did Stephanie and Brittany. For every high-end baby named Stephanie or Brittany, another five lower-income girls received those names within ten years.

So where do lower-end families go name-shopping? Many people assume that naming trends are driven by celebrities. But celebrities actually have a weak effect on baby names. As of 2000, the pop star Madonna had sold 130 million records worldwide but hadn’t generated even the ten copycat namings—in California, no less—required to make the master index of four thousand names from which the sprawling list of girls’ names on page 227 was drawn. Or considering all the Brittanys, Britneys, Brittanis, Brittanies, Brittneys, and Brittnis you encounter these days, you might think of Britney Spears. But she is in fact a symptom, not a cause, of the Brittany/Britney/Brittani/Brittanie/Brittney/Brittni explosion. With the most common spell-
ing of the name, Brittany, at number eighteen among high-end families and number five among low-end families, it is surely approaching its pull date. Decades earlier, Shirley Temple was similarly a symptom of the Shirley boom, though she is often now remembered as its cause. (It should also be noted that many girls’ names, including Shirley, Carol, Leslie, Hilary, Renee, Stacy, and Tracy began life as boys’ names, but girls’ names almost never cross over to boys.)

So it isn’t famous people who drive the name game. It is the family just a few blocks over, the one with the bigger house and newer car. The kind of families that were the first to call their daughters Amber or Heather and are now calling them Lauren or Madison. The kind of families that used to name their sons Justin or Brandon and are now calling them Alexander or Benjamin. Parents are reluctant to poach a name from someone too near—family members or close friends—but many parents, whether they realize it or not, like the sound of names that sound “successful.”

But as a high-end name is adopted en masse, high-end parents begin to abandon it. Eventually, it is considered so common that even lower-end parents may not want it, whereby it falls out of the rotation entirely. The lower-end parents, meanwhile, go looking for the next name that the upper-end parents have broken in.

So the implication is clear: the parents of all those Alexandras, Laurens, Katherines, Madisons, and Rachels should not expect the cachet to last much longer. Those names are already on their way to overexposure. Where, then, will the new high-end names come from?

It wouldn’t be surprising to find them among the “smartest” girls’ and boys’ names in California, listed on pages 197–98, that are still fairly obscure. Granted, some of them—Oona and Glynnis, Florian and Kia—are bound to remain obscure. The same could be surmised of most of the Hebrew names (Rotem and Zofia, Akiva and Zev), even though many of today’s most mainstream names (David,
Jonathan, Samuel, Benjamin, Rachel, Hannah, Sarah, Rebecca) are of course Hebrew biblical names. Aviva may be the one modern Hebrew name that is ready to break out: it’s easy to pronounce, pretty, peppy, and suitably flexible.

Drawn from a pair of “smart” databases, here is a sampling of today’s high-end names. Some of them, as unlikely as it seems, are bound to become tomorrow’s mainstream names. Before you scoff, ask yourself this: do any of them seem more ridiculous than “Madison” might have seemed ten years ago?

Most Popular Girl’s Names of 2015?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annika</th>
<th>Isabel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansley</td>
<td>Kate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>Lara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery</td>
<td>Linden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aviva</td>
<td>Maeve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clementine</td>
<td>Marie-Claire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Maya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Philippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Phoebe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Quinn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flannery</td>
<td>Sophie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Waverly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Popular Boys’ Names of 2015?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aidan</th>
<th>Asher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aldo</td>
<td>Beckett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>Bennett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansel</td>
<td>Carter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Obviously, a variety of motives are at work when parents consider a name for their child. They may want something traditional or something bohemian, something unique or something perfectly trendy. It would be an overstatement to suggest that all parents are looking—whether consciously or not—for a “smart” name or a “high-end” name. But they are all trying to signal something with a name, whether the name is Winner or Loser, Madison or Amber, Shithead or Sander, DeShawn or Jake. What the California names data suggest is that an overwhelming number of parents use a name to signal their own expectations of how successful their children will be. The name isn’t likely to make a shard of difference. But the parents can at least feel better knowing that, from the very outset, they tried their best.
EPILOGUE:
Two Paths to Harvard

And now, with all these pages behind us, an early promise has been confirmed: this book indeed has no “unifying theme.”

But if there is no unifying theme to *Freakonomics*, there is at least a common thread running through the everyday application of *Freakonomics*. It has to do with thinking sensibly about how people behave in the real world. All it requires is a novel way of looking, of discerning, of measuring. This isn’t necessarily a difficult task, nor does it require supersophisticated thinking. We have essentially tried to figure out what the typical gang member or sumo wrestler figured out on his own (although we had to do so in reverse).

Will the ability to think such thoughts improve your life materially? Probably not. Perhaps you’ll put up a sturdy gate around your swimming pool or push your real-estate agent to work a little harder. But the net effect is likely to be more subtle than that. You might become more skeptical of the conventional wisdom; you may begin looking for hints as to how things aren't quite what they seem; per-
haps you will seek out some trove of data and sift through it, balancing your intelligence and your intuition to arrive at a glimmering new idea. Some of these ideas might make you uncomfortable, even unpopular. To claim that legalized abortion resulted in a massive drop in crime will inevitably lead to explosive moral reactions. But the fact of the matter is that *Freakonomics*-style thinking simply doesn't traffic in morality. As we suggested near the beginning of this book, if morality represents an ideal world, then economics represents the actual world.

The most likely result of having read this book is a simple one: you may find yourself asking a lot of questions. Many of them will lead to nothing. But some will produce answers that are interesting, even surprising. Consider the question posed at the beginning of this book’s penultimate chapter: how much do parents really matter?

The data have by now made it clear that parents matter a great deal in some regards (most of which have been long determined by the time a child is born) and not at all in others (the ones we obsess about). You can’t blame parents for trying to do something—anything—to help their child succeed, even if it’s something as irrelevant as giving him a high-end first name.

But there is also a huge random effect that rains down on even the best parenting efforts. If you are in any way typical, you have known some intelligent and devoted parents whose child went badly off the rails. You may have also known of the opposite instance, where a child succeeds despite his parents’ worst intentions and habits.

Recall for a moment the two boys, one white and one black, who were described in chapter 5. The white boy who grew up outside Chicago had smart, solid, encouraging, loving parents who stressed education and family. The black boy from Daytona Beach was abandoned by his mother, was beaten by his father, and had be-
come a full-fledged gangster by his teens. So what became of the two boys?

The second child, now twenty-seven years old, is Roland G. Fryer Jr., the Harvard economist studying black underachievement.

The white child also made it to Harvard. But soon after, things went badly for him. His name is Ted Kaczynski.
The bulk of this book was drawn from the research of Steven D. Levitt, often done in concert with one or more collaborators. The notes below include citations for the academic papers on which the material was based. We have also made liberal use of other scholars’ research, which is also cited below; we thank them not only for their work but for the subsequent conversations that allowed us to best present their ideas. Other material in this book comes from previously unpublished research or interviews by one or both of the authors. Material not listed in these notes was drawn from readily accessible databases, news reports, and reference works.

AN EXPLANATORY NOTE


INTRODUCTION: THE HIDDEN SIDE OF EVERYTHING

3–6  THE FALL AND FALL OF CRIME: The crime-drop argument can be found in Steven D. Levitt, “Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990’s: Four Fac-


13 Eight glasses of water a day: See Robert J. Davis, “Can Water Aid Weight Loss?” *Wall Street Journal*, March 16, 2004, which cites an Institute of Medicine report concluding that “there is no scientific basis for the recommendation [of eight glasses of water a day] and that most people get enough water through normal consumption of foods and beverages.”

14–15 Adam Smith is still well worth reading, of course (especially if you have infinite patience); so too is Robert Heilbroner’s *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), which contains memorable profiles of Smith, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, John Maynard Keynes, Joseph Schumpeter, and other giants of economics.

1. WHAT DO SCHOOLTEACHERS AND SUMO WRESTLERS HAVE IN COMMON?


37–38 THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA BASKETBALL TEST was made public when the university released 1,500 pages of documents in response to an investigation by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.


45–51 **The Bagel Man:** Paul Feldman was looking for a research economist to take an interest in his data, and brought himself to Steven Levitt’s attention. (Several other scholars had passed.) Levitt and then Dubner subsequently visited Feldman’s bagel operation near Washington, D.C. Their research led to an article that was substantially similar to the version of the story published here: Stephen J. Dubner and Steven D. Levitt, “What the Bagel Man Saw,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 6, 2004. Levitt is also writing an academic paper about Feldman’s bagel operation. / 47 The “Beer on the Beach” study is discussed in Richard H. Thaler, “Mental Accounting and Consumer Choice,” *Marketing Science* 4 (Summer 1985), pp. 119–214; also worth reading is Richard H. Thaler, *The Winner’s Curse: Paradoxes and Anomalies of Economic Life* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

2. **How Is the Ku Klux Klan Like a Group of Real-Estate Agents?**

55–66 **Unmasking the Ku Klux Klan:** A number of excellent books have been written about the Ku Klux Klan. For general history, we relied most heavily on Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), and David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865–1965* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965); see also Stetson Kennedy, *After Appomattox: How the South Won the War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995). Of most particular interest to us was Stetson Kennedy, *The Klan Unmasked* (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1990), which was originally published as *I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan* (London: Arco Publishers, 1954). But Stetson Kennedy himself is probably the greatest living repository of Klan lore. (For more information, see www.stetsonkennedy.com; also, many of Kennedy’s papers are housed in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York.) The authors visited Kennedy at his home near Jacksonville, Florida, interviewing him and availing ourselves of his extensive collection of Klan paraphernalia and documentation. (We also tried on his Klan robes.) We are most grateful for his cooperation. The Harvard economist Roland G. Fryer Jr. accompanied us; he and Steven Levitt are currently collaborating on a series of papers about the Ku Klux Klan. It should be noted that Fryer was driving the rental car as we first sought out Kennedy’s
Notes


3. WHY DO DRUG DEALERS STILL LIVE WITH THEIR MOMS?


90 MITCH SNYDER AND THE HOMELESS MILLIONS: The controversy over Snyder’s activism was covered widely, particularly in Colorado newspapers, during
the early 1980s and was revisited in 1990 when Snyder committed suicide. A good overview is provided in Gary S. Becker and Guity Nashat Becker, “How the Homeless ‘Crisis’ Was Hyped,” in The Economics of Life (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 175–76; the chapter was adapted from a 1994 Business Week article by the same authors.

91 **The invention of chronic halitosis:** The strange and compelling story of Listerine is beautifully told in James B. Twitchell, Twenty Ads That Shook the World: The Century’s Most Groundbreaking Advertising and How It Changed Us All (New York: Crown, 2000), pp. 60–69.


92 **Not as much rape as is commonly thought:** The 2002 statistics from the National Crime Survey, which is designed to elicit honest responses, suggests that the lifetime risk of a woman’s being the victim of unwanted sexual activity or attempted unwanted sexual activity is about one in eight (not one in three, as is typically argued by advocates). For men, the National Crime Survey suggests a one-in-forty incidence, rather than the one-in-nine incidence cited by advocates.

92 **Not as much crime as there actually was:** See Mark Niesse, “Report Says Atlanta Underreported Crimes to Help Land 1996 Olympics,” Associated Press, February 20, 2004.

93–109 **Sudhir Venkatesh’s Long, Strange Trip into the Crack Den:** As of this writing, Venkatesh is an associate professor of sociology and African American studies at Columbia University. / 93–99 *The biographical material* on Venkatesh was drawn largely from author interviews; see also Jordan Marsh, “The Gang Way,” Chicago Reader, August 8, 1997; and Robert L. Kaiser, “The Science of Fitting In,” Chicago Tribune, December 10, 2000. / 99–109

Crack dealing as the most dangerous job in America: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the ten most dangerous legitimate occupations are timber cutters, fishers, pilots and navigators, structural metal workers, drivers/sales workers, roofers, electrical power installers, farm occupations, construction laborers, and truck drivers.

The invention of nylon stockings: It was Wallace Carothers, a young Iowa-born chemist employed by DuPont, who, after seven years of trying, found a way to blow liquid polymers through tiny nozzles to create a fiber of superstrong strands. This was nylon. Several years later, DuPont introduced nylon stockings in New York and London. Contrary to lore, the miracle fabric's name did not derive from a combination of those two cities' names. Nor was it, as rumored, an acronym for “Now You've Lost, Old Nippon,” a snub to Japan's dominant silk market. The name was actually a hepped-up rendering of “No Run,” a slogan that the new stockings could not in fact uphold, but whose failure hardly diminished their success. Carothers, a long-time depressive, did not live to see his invention blossom: he killed himself in 1937 by drinking cyanide. See Matthew E. Hermes, Enough for One Lifetime: Wallace Carothers, Inventor of Nylon (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, 1996).


113–14 the various destructive effects of crack are discussed in Roland G. Fryer Jr., Paul Heaton, Steven D. Levitt, and Kevin Murphy, “The Impact of Crack Cocaine,” University of Chicago working paper, 2005.

4. WHERE HAVE ALL THE CRIMINALS GONE?


122 politicians were growing increasingly softer on crime: This and a number of related issues are discussed in Gary S. Becker and Guity Nashat Becker, “Stiffer Jail Terms Will Make Gunmen More Gun-Shy,” “How to Tackle Crime? Take a Tough, Head-On Stance,” and “The Economic Approach to Fighting Crime,” all in The Economics of Life (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 135–44; the chapters were adapted from Business Week articles by the same authors.


124–25 Capital Punishment: For a full report on New York State’s failure to execute a single criminal, see “Capital Punishment in New York State: Statistics from Eight Years of Representation, 1995–2003” (New York: The Capital Defender Office, August 2003), which is available as of this writing at nycdo.org/8yr.html. More recently, New York’s Court of Appeals found the death penalty itself unconstitutional, effectively halting all executions. / 125 Executing 1 criminal translates into 7 fewer homicides: See Isaac Ehrlich, “The Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment: A Question of Life and
Notes

Death,” *American Economic Review* 65 (1975), pp. 397–417; and Isaac Ehrlich, “Capital Punishment and Deterrence: Some Further Thoughts and Evidence,” *Journal of Political Economy* 85 (1977), pp. 741–88. / 125 “I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death”: From Justice Harry A. Blackmun’s dissenting opinion in a 1994 Supreme Court decision denying review of a Texas death-penalty case: *Callins v. Collins*, 510 U.S. 1141 (1994); cited in *Congressional Quarterly Researcher* 5, no. 9 (March 10, 1995). It should be noted that American juries also seem to have lost their appetite for the death penalty—in part, it seems, because of the frequency with which innocent people have been executed in recent years or exonerated while on death row. During the 1990s, an average of 290 criminals were given the death sentence each year; in the first four years of the 2000s, that number had dropped to 174. See Adam Liptak, “Fewer Death Sentences Being Imposed in U.S.,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2004.


The “Aging Population” Theory: See Steven D. Levitt, “The Limited Role of Changing Age Structure in Explaining Aggregate Crime Rates,” Criminology 37, no. 3 (1999), pp. 581–99. Although the aging theory has by now been widely discounted, learned experts continue to float it; see Matthew L. Wald, “Most Crimes of Violence and Property Hover at 30-Year Low,” New York Times, September 13, 2004, in which Lawrence A. Greenfield, director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, says, “There is probably no single factor explanation for why the crime rates have been going down all these years and are now at the lowest level since we started measuring them in 1973. It probably has to do with demographics, and it probably has to do with having a lot of very high-rate offenders behind bars.” / 135 “There lurks a cloud”: See James Q. Wilson, “Crime and Public Policy” in Crime, ed. James Q. Wilson and Joan Petersilia (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1995), p. 507.


5. WHAT MAKES A PERFECT PARENT?


160–75 the black-white test score gap and the ecls: This material was drawn from Roland G. Fryer Jr. and Steven D. Levitt, “Understanding the Black-White Test Score Gap in the First Two Years of School,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 86, no. 2 (2004), pp. 447–464. While this paper contains little discussion of the correlation between test scores and home-based factors (television viewing, spanking, etc.), a regression of those data is included in the paper’s appendix. Regarding the ECLS study itself: as of this writing, an overview of the study was posted at nces.ed.gov/ecls/.


6. PERFECT PARENTING, PART II; OR: WOULD A ROSHANDA BY ANY OTHER NAME SMELL AS SWEET?


180–81 the judge and the temptress: Based on author interviews.

182 roland g. fryer and the study of black underachievement: Drawn from author interviews.

182 the black-white cigarette gap: See Lloyd Johnston, Patrick O’Malley,


186 **“White” résumés beating out “black” résumés:** The most recent audit study to reach such a conclusion is Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment Evidence on Labor Market Discrimination,” National Bureau of Economic Research working paper, 2003.


188 **William Morris, né Zelman Moses:** Author interview with Alan Kannof, former chief operating officer of the William Morris Agency.

190 **Brand names as first names:** Drawn from California birth-certificate data and also discussed in Stephanie Kang, “Naming the Baby: Parents Brand Their Tot with What’s Hot,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2003.

190 **A girl named Shithead:** The woman who called the radio show to tell Roland Fryer about her niece Shithead might have been misinformed, of course, or even outright lying. Regardless, she was hardly alone in her feeling that black names sometimes go too far. Bill Cosby, during a speech in May 2004 at the NAACP’s *Brown v. Board of Education* fiftieth-anniversary gala, lambasted lower-income blacks for a variety of self-destructive behaviors, including the giving of “ghetto” names. Cosby was summarily excoriated by white and black critics alike. (See Barbara Ehrenreich, “The New Cosby Kids,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2004; and Debra Dickerson, “America’s Granddad Gets Ornery,” *Slate*, July 13, 2004.) Soon after, the California education secretary, Richard Riordan—the wealthy, white former mayor of Los Angeles—found himself under attack for a perceived racial slight. (See Tim Rutten, “Riordan Stung by ‘Gotcha’ News,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 2004.) Riordan, visiting a Santa Barbara library to promote a reading program, met a
six-year-old girl named Isis. She told Riordan that her name meant “Egyptian princess”; Riordan, trying to make a joke, replied, “It means stupid, dirty girl.” The resultant outrage led black activists to call for Riordan’s resignation. Mervyn Dymally, a black assemblyman from Compton, explained that Isis was “a little African-American girl. Would he have done that to a white girl?” As it turned out, however, Isis was white. Some activists tried to keep the anti-Riordan protest alive, but Isis’s mother, Trinity, encouraged everyone to relax. Her daughter, she explained, hadn’t taken Riordan’s joke seriously. “I got the impression,” Trinity said, “that she didn’t think he was very bright.”

OrangeJello and LemonJello: Although these names have the whiff of urban legend about them—they are, in fact, discussed on a variety of websites that dispel (or pass along) urban legends—the authors learned of the existence of OrangeJello and LemonJello from Doug McAdam, a sociologist at Stanford University, who swears he met the twin boys in a grocery store.

A much longer list of girls’ and boys’ names: Here lies an arbitrary collection of names that are interesting, pretty, uncommon, very common, or somehow quintessential, along with the level of education that they signify. (Each name occurs at least ten times in the California names data.)

Some Girls’ Names

(Years of mother’s education in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Mother’s Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>14.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alessandra</td>
<td>15.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>14.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>14.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>14.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amalia</td>
<td>15.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>13.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>12.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>14.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabelle</td>
<td>14.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasia</td>
<td>13.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelina</td>
<td>12.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabel</td>
<td>15.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>15.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anya</td>
<td>14.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>12.86</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ava</td>
<td>14.97</td>
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<td>Aziza</td>
<td>11.52</td>
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<td>Bailey</td>
<td>13.83</td>
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<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>14.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatriz</td>
<td>11.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>12.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>11.50</td>
</tr>
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<td>Breanna</td>
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* Concerning the teenage girl named Temptress on p. 180: judging from Chastity’s poor showing here, it is doubtful that Temptress would have gained much benefit from being called Chastity.
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SOME BOYS’ NAMES
( Years of mother’s education in parentheses)

Aaron (13.74), Abdelrahman (14.08), Adam (14.07), Aidan (15.35), Alexander (14.49), Alistair (15.34), Andrew (14.19), Aristotle (14.20), Ashley (12.95), Atticus (14.97), Baylor (14.84), Bjorn (15.12), Blane (13.55), Blue (13.85), Brian (13.92), Buck (12.81), Bud (12.21), Buddy (11.95), Caleb (13.91), Callum (15.20), Carter (14.98), Chaim (14.63), Christ (11.50), Christian (13.55), Clyde (12.94), Cooper (14.96), Dakota (12.92), Daniel (14.01), Dashiell (15.26), David (13.77), Deniz (15.65), Dylan (13.58), Eamon (15.39), Elton (12.23), Emil (14.05), Eric (14.02), Finn (15.87), Forrest (13.75), Franklin (13.55), Gabriel (14.39), Gary (12.56), Giancarlo (15.05), Giuseppe (13.24), Graydon (15.51), Gustavo (11.68), Hashem (12.76), Hugh (14.60), Hugo (13.00), Idean (14.35), Indiana (13.80), Isaiah (13.12), Jackson (15.22), Jacob (13.76), Jagger (13.27), Jamieson (15.13), Jedidiah (14.06), Jeffrey (13.88), Jeremy (13.46), Jesus (8.71), Jihad (11.60), Johan (15.11), John-Paul (14.22), Jonathan (13.86), Jordan (13.73), Jorge (10.49), Joshua (13.49), Josiah (13.98), Jules (15.48), Justice (12.45), Kai (14.85), Keau (13.17), Keller (15.07), Kevin (14.03), Kieron (14.00), Kobe (13.12), Kramer (14.80), Kurt (14.33), Lachlan (15.60), Lars (15.09), Leo (14.76), Lev (14.35), Lincoln (14.87), Lonny (11.93), Luca (13.56), Malcolm (14.80), Marvin (11.86), Max (14.93), Maximilian (15.17), Michael (13.66), Michelangelo (15.58), Miro (15.00), Mohammad (12.45), Moises (9.69), Moses (13.11), Moshe (14.41), Muhammad (13.21), Mustafa (13.85), Nathaniel (14.13), Nicholas (14.02), Noah (14.45), Norman (12.90), Oliver (15.14), Orlando (12.72), Otto (13.73), Parker (14.69), Parsa (15.22), Patrick (14.25), Paul (14.13), Peter (15.00), Philip (14.82), Philippe (15.61), Phoenix (13.08), Presley (12.68), Quentin (13.84), Ralph (13.45), Raphael (14.63), Reagan (14.92), Rex (13.77), Rexford (14.89), Rocco (13.68), Rocky (11.47), Roland (13.95), Romain (15.69), Royce (13.73), Russell (13.68), Ryan (14.04), Sage (13.63), Saleh (10.15), Satchel (15.52), Schuyler (14.73), Sean (14.12), Sequoia (13.15), Sergei (14.28), Sergio (11.92), Shawn (12.72), Shelby (12.88), Simon (14.74), Slater (14.62), Solomon (14.20), Spencer (14.53), Stephen (14.01), Stetson (12.90), Steven (13.31), Tanner (13.82), Tariq (13.16), Tennyson (15.63), Terence (14.36), Terry (12.16), Thaddeus (14.56), Theodore (14.61), Thomas (14.08), Timothy (13.58), Toby (13.24), Trace (14.09), Trevor (13.89), Tristan (13.95), Troy (13.52), Ulysses (14.25), Uriel (15.00), Valentino (12.25), Virgil (11.87), Vladimir (13.37), Walker (14.75), Whitney (15.58), Willem (15.38), William (14.17), Willie (12.12), Winston (15.07), Xavier (13.37), Yasser (14.25), Zachary (14.02), Zachory (11.92), Zane (13.93), and Zebulon (15.00).
Most popular white girl names, 1960 and 2000: The California names data actually begin in 1961, but the year-to-year difference is negligible.

Shirley Temple as symptom, not cause: See Stanley Lieberson, *A Matter of Taste: How Names, Fashions, and Culture Change* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000). A Harvard sociologist, Lieberson is the acknowledged master of (among other subjects) the academic study of names. For instance, *A Matter of Taste* details how, from 1960, it was American Jewish families who first popularized many girls’ names (Amy, Danielle, Erica, Jennifer, Jessica, Melissa, Rachel, Rebecca, Sarah, Stacy, Stephanie, Tracy) while only a handful (Ashley, Kelly, and Kimberly) began in non-Jewish families. Another good discussion of naming habits can be found in Peggy Orenstein, “Where Have All the Lisas Gone?” *New York Times Magazine*, July 6, 2003; and, if only for entertainment, see *The Sweetest Sound* (2001), Alan Berliner’s documentary film about names.

Boys’ names becoming girls’ names (but not vice versa): This observation is drawn from the work of Cleveland Kent Evans, a psychologist and onomastician at Bellevue University in Bellevue, Nebraska. A sample of Evans’s work is available as of this writing at academic.bellevue.edu/~CKEvans/cevans.html; see also Cleveland Kent Evans, *Unusual & Most Popular Baby Names* (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Publications International/Signet, 1994); and Cleveland Kent Evans, *The Ultimate Baby Name Book* (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Publications International/Plume, 1997).

EPILOGUE. TWO PATHS TO HARVARD

The white boy who grew up outside Chicago: This passage, as well as the earlier passage about the same boy on pp. 155–56, was drawn from author interviews and from Ted Kaczynski, *Truth Versus Lies*, unpublished manuscript, 1998; see also Stephen J. Dubner, “I Don’t Want to Live Long. I Would Rather Get the Death Penalty than Spend the Rest of My Life in Prison,” *Time*, October 18, 1999.

The black boy from Daytona Beach: This passage, as well as the earlier passage about the same boy on p. 156, were drawn from author interviews with Roland G. Fryer Jr.
and Colin Camerer. And to Linda Jines, who came up with the title: nicely done.

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe an enormous debt to my many co-authors and colleagues, whose great ideas fill this book, and to all the kind people who have taken the time to teach me what I know about economics and life. I am especially grateful to the University of Chicago, whose Initiative on Chicago Price Theory provides me the ideal research home; and also to the American Bar Foundation for its collegiality and support. My wife, Jeannette, and our children, Amanda, Olivia, Nicholas, and Sophie, make every day a joy, even though we miss Andrew so much. I thank my parents, who showed me it was okay to be different. Most of all, I want to thank my good friend and co-author Stephen Dubner, who is a brilliant writer and a creative genius.

—S. D. L.

I have yet to write a book that did not germinate, or was not at least brought along, in the pages of the *New York Times Magazine*. This one is no exception. For that I thank Hugo Lindgren, Adam Moss, and Gerry Marzorati; also, thanks to Vera Titunik and Paul Tough for inviting the Bagel Man into the *Magazine’s* pages. I am most grateful to Steven Levitt, who is so clever and wise and even kind as to make me wish—well, almost—that I had become an economist myself. Now I know why half the profession dreams of having an adjoining office to Levitt. And finally, as always, thanks and love to Ellen, Solomon, and Anya. See you at dinnertime.

—S. J. D.
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