

A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History of Jewish Name Changing in America

Kirsten Fermaglich

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Name changing is a familiar part of the popular American immigration story and is particularly associated with Jewish immigrants, with landmark stories like *The Jazz Singer* featuring Jewish leads changing their names. In *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name*, Kirsten Fermaglich explores the real history behind Jewish name changing in the US, locating both the fact and fiction in popular perceptions around the phenomenon.

It turns out that name changing was not nearly as prevalent during the twentieth century as pop culture may have us believe. Even people having their names changed at Ellis Island was not that common. However, some stereotypes are shown to have truth. Research into legal petitions for name changes reveals that Jews in New York City did indeed seek name changes in disproportionate numbers. The reasons for this vary, though nearly all were in some way seeking to better their employment prospects or social standing. The history of Jewish name changing is shown to go hand in hand with the shifting tides of anti-Semitism in America.

Fermaglich, an associate professor of history and Jewish studies at Michigan State University, has meticulously sourced her book. Every claim and observation is backed up with court records and articles from the time periods she surveys, and she also collates salient trends into easy-to-understand graphs and charts.

The book is written with an academic audience in mind, and purely as a resource it's a worthy accomplishment. But one doesn't have to be a student, academic, or even a hobbyist historian to appreciate *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name*. The writing is accessible enough for anyone with an interest in the subject matter to enjoy it. If you look deep enough into even the most minor aspect of society, you'll learn a good deal about how the whole system works, and this book is stellar proof.

DANIEL SCHINDEL (November/December 2018)

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