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Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern  
Spain and Mexico (review)

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(Review)

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and alternative medicine plays a role in this book as does the perceived link between appearance and constitution, i.e. aestheticism as a reflector of health. A final chapter is dedicated to nudist culture in Weimar Germany, complete with illustrations of advocates, consumers and parks at the time. For all its presumed innocence, nudism created a vision of equality, a *Volksgemeinschaft*, that transcended social and political divisions and, instead, created a community of happy people committed to similar hobbies and leisure activities.

In the end we may conclude that health, beauty and the human body meant different things to different people but always encompassed a vision of utopianism in a world that seemed threatening, lonely and lacking in promise to people in many different strata of society. Hau thus presents us with a wonderful example of what has come to be known as *Körpergeschichte*, body history, which ascribes both literal and metaphorical meaning to the idea of the physical self. Body history can be understood as an investigation of the human corpus and its interpretation over time. But it can also be seen as a canvas in which the term “body” assumes a meaning beyond its physical existence. By integrating medical and social history and uncovering a wealth of visual images, Michael Hau has successfully done both.

It is, however, very difficult to read this book and not think about similar phenomena elsewhere before, after, and even at the time. Hau cautions us to understand the cult of health and beauty in Germany on its own terms and not necessarily frame it by racial discourses prevalent in the Third Reich. But even so, should we not draw parallels to other areas and other times as well? For example, physical exercise and character building were an integral part of U.S. and British late nineteenth-century culture—are we to apply Hau’s conclusions to these areas as well or should we look for other explanations? Was the cult of health and beauty a western and international phenomenon with culturally specific expressions or should we understand it—as Sonja Goltermann has done—on primarily national terms? And when did or does it end? Much of Hau’s narrative will resonate with a generation today driven by the cult of fitness as exhibited in postmodern gyms, TV ads, and health advice books. Are we to look to the late nineteenth century in order to grasp the underlying meaning of this disposition?

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*Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico.* By Federico Garza Carvajal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. xx plus 310 pp. \$27.50).

This book represents a significant reworking of a University of Texas dissertation. It interprets the early modern Spanish prosecution of sodomites, in the peninsula and in New Spain, as the result of the danger Spaniards thought sodomy posed to their concept of the New Spanish Man (*vir*) which, the au-

thor alleges but fails to document, empire brought with it. The prosecutions in question are some 175 cases brought by secular authorities in Andalusia (the High Courts in Seville and Granada and the Casa de Contratación) and a score brought by secular tribunals in Mexico City in 1657 and 1658.

In his prologue, the author begins with a proclamation: "First, I position my study of early modern Spanish manliness squarely within the field of postmodern theorizing and theorists. . . ." (p. 3). But as far as this reader can determine, this positioning boils down in practice to nothing more than the author's conviction that these prosecutions expressed male political power in imperial Spain. To be sure, Garza presents no evidence that the prosecutors themselves made such associations, nor did they. Yet to my knowledge no modern historian has ever doubted the presence of such power. Inevitably the differences between male prosecutors and male victims would be expressed in gendered terms, the victims becoming girlies, Nancies, Mollies and the like, so that it is curious at best for Garza while emphasizing power to dismiss both a gendered and apparently a generational approach to these anti-sodomy prosecutions, when in fact gender and generational rhetorics *are* often the cultural-political languages of such persecutions.

Alas, once all the historiographical posturing and associated name-dropping is stripped away, this book will be judged not for any imagined theoretical contribution but for the usefulness of the source materials and their analysis. Seen from this angle, there is much of value in the work. Characterized by wide reading and the use of fresh primary materials excavated through admirable archival searching, the author brings forward his findings in two distinct chapters that follow on early chapters dedicated to thematic historiography and a setting of stages, the author turning in chapters three and four to what is new and previously inedited.

Chapter three, entitled "Mariner, Would You Scratch My Legs," represents the author's gleanings from the aforementioned 175 peninsular cases the author found mainly in the Sevillian Archive of the Indies. The majority concern cases of sodomy practiced at sea. His procedure is to consecutively narrate the highlights of perhaps a score of these cases with a minimum of interpretation, the chapter then concluding with one page of interpretive summation. The author is careful to regularly spell out the ages of the parties to the alleged sodomy as a part of his narratives, but nowhere in his work does he provide any tabular or serial overview of this or any other social fact, so that only the dedicated reader like this reviewer can gain any idea of their substance. In short, we must be satisfied with Garza's brief summations which, on examination, often do not concur with the narratives. Just one example: the author claims in the summation of this chapter (130) that "in all cases, the boys and the young men involved engaged in some sort of reciprocal sodomy. That is, they anally penetrated others as well as allowing others to anally penetrate them." But my reading of the narratives found not a single case where each partner penetrated the other. Instead, in all Garza's cases described in this chapter, the younger party of a twosome always assumed the passive sexual role with that opposite, active, number.

The same procedure of bare narrative with no tabulation or ongoing glossing or interpretation of these narratives occurs again in chapter four, which deals with a group of late seventeenth-century cross-dressing "sodomites" in Mexico

City. Once again, the author fails to authoritatively exploit his hard-won, wonderful source materials. This is the more troubling because with the exception of appendices of two trial texts, quotes from the sources throughout the book are given only in English, so the unwilling reader must trust Garza's translations of a highly idiosyncratic sexual and scatological language.

Thus on the one hand no one will gainsay the insight these judicial source materials, even in mere translation, begin to allow us into the details of sexual behavior and values of the Spanish Golden Age. But on the other this is a book that only threatens to become a work of scholarship regarding its subject, leaving this reader sorely disappointed. Two further observations will drive my point home. First, with rare exceptions Garza simply ignores all previous scholarship on his subject. First, the reader of this book is never told that the Mexican trials of 1657 and 1658 were years ago the subject of an important article by Serge Gruzinski, nor that the present reviewer has published a detailed monograph on native American homosexual behaviors as encountered by the Spaniards through the early seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> In short, there is almost no scholarly discourse in Garza's book, no ongoing demonstration through comparing, contrasting and crediting previous efforts, of what makes this book an addition to existing scholarship.

Thus this book exists as if in a vacuum as regards New Spain, for among other things one cannot possibly understand "indio" and mestizo homosexual behavior (p. 179) in 1657 if one does not know the central role the lifelong transvested male berdache had long played in traditional native culture, for presumably, the noteworthy amount of cross-dressing in Garza's documents traces back at least in part to this (by Garza unexamined) institution of the berdache. But the problem reaches deeper, into the thematic realm. The author of this book on the *prosecution* of sodomites by a Mediterranean culture never consulted the landmark, authoritative work of Michael Rocke precisely on the *prosecution* of thousands of such males in the city of Florence during the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Once again, Garza operates in the dark, for surely the Florentine experience was known to the Spaniards. If he had read Rocke, for instance, the author would not have described Spaniards burning the guilty so as to combat sodomy. For as Mediterraneans knew and Rocke long ago showed, burning did not decrease sodomy. It only drove the "sin" further underground, where it flourished the more.

It is regrettable that Garza's hard labor did not issue in the work of social history that it deserved to become. Let us hope that the author continues to work on this important subject, while deepening his approach to the materials that rightfully intrigue him.

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## ENDNOTES

1. S. Gruzinski, "Las cenizas del deseo: homosexuales novohispanos a mediados del siglo XVII," in *De la santidad a la perversión o de porqué no se cumplía la ley de Dios en la sociedad novohispana*, ed. S. Ortega (Mexico City, 1985), 255–281; R. Trexler, *Sex and*

*Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca, 1995).

2. M. Roche, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1996).

*The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*. By Suzanne Desan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. xiv plus 456 pp. \$50.00).

A book review can scarcely begin to explain the significance of Suzanne Desan's *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*. In short, this work, though it almost completely eschews a polemical style, takes on three major positions developed since the early 1970's regarding the French Revolution. First, despite an early commitment to social history, revolutionary scholars abandoned it even sooner than many other historians for the linguistic turn. Although Desan uses discourse, especially regarding the construction of gender, she remains committed to social history, in order to explore behaviors. In large part, this study relies on techniques used by family historians. Second, the book challenges the main substantive assertions by François Furet and others that the Revolution, despite a nod to libertarianism, became quickly absorbed in egalitarian concerns that led directly to the Terror. To the contrary, Desan believes that the revolutionaries initiated a radical individualism in policy and practice concerning the family that would, despite a retreat in the nineteenth century, never be completely undone. And as many scholars before her have done, she finds that views of family were central to the entire eighteenth-century project of change: While the Old Regime depended on a king and patriarchy, the new would be democratic and egalitarian in family interactions.

Finally, and more openly here than for the other themes already noted, the work confronts the dominant thesis regarding the revolution and gender announced first by Joan Landes in 1988 and still largely triumphant. In the reigning approach, the Enlightenment and Revolution from the start were hostile to women. The nineteenth century cult of domesticity located its origin in this revolutionary development. Instead, for Desan, the Enlightenment attacked the paternalism of the Old Regime and the Revolution and replaced it with a system raising the individual to new heights. In short, marriage—sounding very modern—became the contract between two free people who could dissolve it at will. In this version, domesticity emerged as a reaction against this revolutionary endeavor.

A brief review can only give a summary and outline of the structure and arguments of *The Family on Trial*. The initial chapters analyze the Enlightenment's assault on the patriarchal Old Regime and the development of the revolutionaries' new vision. Desan assumes that one can generally speak of a revolutionary approach to constructing the family that began in 1789 and persisted through the decade. From this view emerges a revolutionary definition of family relations. Desan finds three essential characteristics. First, as part of the new definition of the autonomous individual, men and women freely entered marriage