COLONIAL GENDER HISTORY

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WOMEN WHO LIVE EVIL LIVES: GENDER, RELIGION, AND THE POLITICS OF POWER IN COLONIAL GUATEMALA. By Martha Few. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. Pp. 188. $45.00 cloth, $19.95 paper.)

WOMEN'S LIVES IN COLONIAL QUITO: GENDER, LAW, AND ECONOMY IN SPANISH AMERICA. By Kimberly Gauderman. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. Pp. 177. $24.50 cloth.)

NEITHER SAINTS NOR SINNERS: WRITING THE LIVES OF WOMEN IN SPANISH AMERICA. By Kathleen Ann Myers. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. 273. $60.00 cloth, $24.95 paper.)

SURPRISE HEIRS I: ILLEGITIMACY, PATRIMONIAL RIGHTS, AND LEGAL NATIONALISM IN LUSO-BRAZILIAN INHERITANCE, 1750–1821. By Linda Lewin. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 214. $55.00 cloth.)

SURPRISE HEIRS II: ILLEGITIMACY, INHERITANCE RIGHTS, AND PUBLIC POWER IN THE FORMATION OF IMPERIAL BRAZIL, 1822–1889. By Linda Lewin. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 397. $60.00 cloth.)

INFAMOUS DESIRE: MALE HOMOSEXUALITY IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA. Edited by Pete Sigal. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. 223. $50.00 cloth, $20.00 paper.)

Latin American colonial social history recently celebrated its fifty-first birthday, since it was in 1953 that Richard Konetzke published the first volume of his *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica, 1493–1810.*[1] The intervening years have seen methodologies, ranging from prosopography and quantitative analysis to the "new" social history, come and go and sometimes come again.

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[1] (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953–1962); James Lockhart's path-breaking monograph, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560: A Colonial Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), the first major work of colonial social history published in the United States, appeared in 1968.

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At the same time new topics have been born and old topics have been reworked. Thus we have important studies of social groups, marriage and family, "subalterns," women's history, and more limited studies of gender history, crime, childhood, honor, and sexuality.

Within these many subfields of social history, colonial Latin American women's history is today a well-established field of study. It began to take off in the late 1970s with the publication of Asunción Lavrin's edited volume, *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*,[2] and was involved in documenting the social and economic roles of women while understanding both the scope and limits of their actions. As another generation of scholars emerges, a generation much influenced by James Scott's idea of "colonialism as a contested process," new interpretations of the role of women in colonial society are being put forth. Colonial women, according to this new paradigm, were social actors able to resist a European male-dominated social and economic structure. Furthermore, non-elite women (members of so-called "subaltern groups") demonstrate a high degree of "agency" in resisting the colonial system. Thus, this work raises the question of the degree to which colonial women were either victims of patriarchy or a self-empowered group able to fashion their response to power.

In spite of its rather vague subtitle, *Women Who Live Evil Lives* is ostensibly about "female sorcerers, witches, magical healers and leaders of clandestine religious devotions" (2). Martha Few is interested in the relationship of gender (and to a lesser extent ethnicity) to religion and power, but she is hardly the first scholar to write on this topic.[3] The locale for this study is the city of Santiago de Guatemala from 1650 to 1750, and while the author justifies this location, we are never told why she chose to study these years.

This book is representative of a spate of doctoral dissertations produced in the 1990s that have systematically mined one or another type of Inquisition cases. Few's book is an example of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to history. One clear weakness is the scant number of cases; indeed, according to the author, cases involving male sorcery were more common. Unfortunately she makes little attempt to consider these cases in an analysis of gender-based differences. In spite of having only forty-four cases (or an average of less than one case every two years), Few ignores most of this evidence, concentrating instead on a handful of *legajos*, such as that concerning Gerónima de Barahona, a *mulata* beef seller. The temporal dimension of these cases is also ignored. For example, how many women were practicing magic at any one time? Did magical practices remain the same over the one hundred years covered in this study? Was there any change in the way sorcerers, witches, and healers defended their actions or were treated by authorities?

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[2] (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978).

[3] Ruth Behar published an article on women and witchcraft as early as 1987. Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin: Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico," *American Ethnologist*, 14 (1): 34–54 (February 1987). See also "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonial, and Women's Power: Views from the Mexican Inqusition," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Asunción Lavrin, 178–206 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

While the book is somewhat light on documentary evidence and analysis, this shortcoming is more than compensated for by a plethora of theories and, when necessary, the obligatory code words to prove that the author is critically savvy. Few takes as a given that colonialism was a contested process in which the poor exercised power and authority. Intent on uncovering "rich discourses" and "complicated and contested processes" she also sees colonial society as one in which "sexual violence . . . formed a key aspect of the construction of patriarchy" (44). Nonetheless, through magical violence, illness, healing and love magic, Few claims that female sorcerers gained control over bodies and achieved empowerment for both their gender and their races. But her interpretation of female sorcery is so closely tied to colonialism (it indeed becomes part of an ethnic and cultural resistance to colonial rule) that we can little account for similar practices in Europe. The net result is that although Few finds female sorcery to be a source of immense culture and economic power, the reader is never quite convinced that she has proved her case.

Perhaps most annoying is that Few repeatedly ignores intriguing clues found in the cases she cites. She pays no attention to the prevalence of widows among those accused of witchcraft, nor to the length of time that local authorities ignored charges against women blamed for casting spells. The fact that generally lenient punishment was meted out to women, regardless of their social and racial attributes is never mentioned. If, as Few tells us, authorities failed to investigate women like Barahona for more than ten years, one must wonder if the Church or the State perceived these women as quite as powerful as Few would like us to believe.

According to Few, female sorcerers were called *mujeres de mala vida*, hence the book's title. It is intriguing that the same expression was used in several regions of Spanish America when speaking of immoral women (specifically sexually immoral women) while a related expression *sufrir una mala vida* was applied to female victims of marital abuse. Few seems to be unaware that there were different meanings of the term and never makes it clear if these other connotations were also understood in the Guatemalan cases.

Few sees sorcery as empowering women within a patriarchal system. Kimberly Gauderman, in *Women's Lives in Colonial Quito*, not only agrees that women of all races were empowered but also argues that seventeenth-century Latin America was not a patriarchal society. Her proof lays primarily in a discussion of the legal rights of women in colonial Spanish America and information on women's participation in the local Quito market, although she also discusses a handful of criminal cases involving women, and mentions a few female entrepreneurs.

This is an interesting and sure to be controversial book. Like Few, Gauderman's argument about women's legal empowerment is based on a small number of cases, although her evidence is not drawn from Inquisition material but rather from civil and criminal cases. While never quite defining what she means by patriarchy, Gauderman nevertheless seems intent on pillorying male scholars who have written about gender relations, specifically portraying Richard Boyer and Steve Stern as unreconstructed defenders of patriarchy. Intent on underlining the importance of her work, she accuses other scholars of relying "on a patriarchal model in reconstructing women's lives," a model which makes these historians "complicit in constructing a Third World woman," that is, woman as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized" (13). This is hardly what the scholars she faults have done.[4] Furthermore, while railing against generalizations about women's lack of power within the family, she manages to produce some rather stunning generalizations herself, arguing that "the general practice by historians of Spanish American women has . . . [viewed] . . . family relations by situating Spanish culture within Europe's Old Regime (i.e., patriarchal) societies" (15). To the best of my knowledge, historians of Spanish American women have at least for the last thirty years recognized that legally the Spanish system of property and inheritance was very different from that of many other European countries. The fact that Spanish law and tradition included the rights of dowry, communal property for spouses and partible inheritance for all legitimate children is not news. But historians (including Boyer and Stern) are also aware of the distance between law and reality as well as inconsistencies among various laws. Gauderman repeatedly fails to realize that legislation and social norms are not the same thing, a point stressed by many of the historians she finds wanting.

Gauderman also stresses the decentralized nature of power in colonial Latin America (or, in theoretical lingo "contested power relations") and suggests that every parish in colonial Quito acted independently from higher levels of authority. She seems unaware that this argument adds credence to the distance between law and local social norms. Perhaps the issue is not Hispanic law but rather why local *quiteño* conditions allowed women the freedom she finds existed. Gauderman concludes that "the colonial government viewed patriarchy as disruptive to a social order that culturally and institutionally undermined all forms of centralized control" (126). In addition to interpreting patriarchy, a system that supposedly gave each man complete control of his household as "centralized control," Gauderman fails to consider that only the most egregious cases of abuse of patriarchal control were brought before the courts. Colonial courts were always willing to control those abuses of authority that defied established social and moral boundaries.

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[4] For example, Stern repeatedly shows how women manipulated the system as best they could by using patriarchal kin and elders to support them in their marital quarrels. Boyer argues that it was women who often brought bigamy charges against their wandering husbands.

Gauderman's intellectual heroine is Patricia Seed who argues in her book, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico*,[5] that the Church, not parents, had ultimate authority over marriage choice. Following Seed, Gauderman believes that "women faced greater restrictions in their activities" in the eighteenth century, in part because of "men's authority . . . was strengthened through control over their children's marriage decisions" (24). As neat as this dichotomy between Hapsburg and Bourbon control of America might be, it ignores three important factors: social hierarchy, informal control, and demography. In spite of Seed's vision of Church-defended freedom of marital choice, marriage was always of great interest to elite and other families, who influenced both male and female children's choice of marriage partners. This informal control, exercised through mechanisms as varied as childhood socialization and control of single women's geographic mobility, cannot be ignored, regardless of what Church doctrine theoretically allowed. The eighteenth-century Real Pragmática on Marriage, a law that was technically to be applied only to *españoles* (whites), codified the power that elite parents had always enjoyed. Interestingly, because of the elite pattern of men marrying women several years younger than themselves, the parent who frequently exercised "patriarchal" authority was the woman who had survived her husband.

Furthermore, Gauderman's discussion of married women's property rights speaks of dowries, but fails to analyze the form that dowry property took. Were women given landholdings as dowry? Or, as I strongly suspect, did their property take the form of clothing, furniture, and at times, domestic slaves? Her chapters on market women are far more convincing. She finds that these women, mostly indigenous non-Spanish-speakers, were victorious in stopping a campaign that Spanish male shop owners undertook to limit the products the women could sell, thus defending their place in the retail market.

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[5] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

Religious women have long been a topic of serious study in colonial Latin America. Indeed, work on cloistered nuns was among the first topics examined by women's history; since the 1970s several important studies of the cloistered nuns and the economic and social roles of their orders have been produced. Interest in religious women who chose not to enter cloisters but rather live in society while pursuing a holy life (*beatas*) is a more recent topic of study. Literary scholars have taken an interest in the writings of all these women, uncovering a world of literate nuns and *beatas* that included celebrated figures such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz as well as a host of the less famous.

Kathleen Ann Myers' *Neither Saints Nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America* provides the newest addition to an already rich scholarly literature, successfully combining literature and history to add still another dimension to the history of religious women: the writing and rewriting of their lives. Myers concentrates on six women in seventeenth-century Spanish America, three (the lay holy women Rosa de Lima and Catarina de San Juan; and the Augustinian nun Madre María de San José) who adhered closely to the perfect example of religiosity (the "potential saints") and three (the Hieronymite nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; the Clarist nun, Ursula Suárez; and the lapsed nun, Catalina de Erauso) who followed a more problematic religious path (the "not quite sinners").

Unlike clergymen, holy women were often required by their confessors to write about their religious experiences. Myers examines both the lives and the writings (confessionals, autobiographies (*vidas*), journals, and one published autobiography) of these women. She convincingly argues that although most of these writings followed a set rhetorical form, their female authors often expressed their individuality by mapping out differing paths to holiness. But beyond analyzing the vidas themselves, Myers also examines the ways in which both lives and vidas were rewritten (or rescripted) usually in priest-authored hagiographic biographies after the holy woman's death. She envisions these priests as attempting to conform to the political and religious needs of the Catholic Church at the same time they worked to achieve sainthood for their local candidate. Like Few and Gauderman, Myers sees her work as reexamining the picture of the colonial woman, in this case by questioning the idea of the perfect nun. In addition, she attempts to put each of them in the context of her time and place. This is laudable, but unfortunately the temporal context is too narrowly drawn. It would be helpful to have more information on the internal politics of both Church and State in order to better understand the various degrees of post-mortem success that these women achieved. In addition, Myers would be well served to deepen her discussion of change over time. Myers also assumes that all nuns who authored vidas hoped for sainthood, although it is clear that that vidas were a well-established genre of female writing.

Neither Saints Nor Sinners is nonetheless an interesting and most readable book. On the whole, Myers' prose is graceful, and with a handful of glaring exceptions, jargon free. And while never directly addressing the issue of whether these holy women were victims or empowered agents, she succeeds in drawing a complex and nuanced picture of their lives and their relationship to male authority figures.

While Few, Gauderman, and Myers focus on women in seventeenth-century Spanish America, the two-volume work by Linda Lewin, *Surprise Heirs I: Illegitimacy, Patrimonial Rights, and Legal Nationalism in Luso-Brazilian Inheritance, 1750–1821*, and *Surprise Heirs II: Illegitimacy, Inheritance Rights, and Public Power in the Formation of Imperial Brazil, 1822–1889* shifts to Brazil in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These volumes are detailed studies of law and its effects on society, concentrating on the private arena of marriage and children. Lewin is engaged in writing serious legal history, examining the intellectual and socioeconomic ramification of far-ranging legal changes within the Portuguese world. She makes an important contribution to the empowerment-victim debate from another angle, by arguing that sweeping changes in the legal code, especially those laws that governed inheritance and property ownership, produced greater social change than any individual or group resisting "hegemony."

The first of the two volumes traces a critical shift central to an understanding of nineteenth-century Brazilian legal development. Historically the Portuguese legal tradition, in sharp contrast to Anglo-American law, distinguished between two groups of illegitimate children, the natural born and the spurious. Although a parent could grant children born out of wedlock a legal status similar to that of legitimate children, offspring deemed to be of spurious birth (children born of adulterous or incestuous unions, or of priests or nuns) were excluded from inheritance. Lewin delves into the thought of Mello Freire dos Reys, a leading jurist at the Law Faculty of Coimbra University, priest, author, and a proponent of the "good law," or law that reflected national values and practices. From the 1750s on, Lewin argues, he and other Portuguese legal scholars worked to remove illegitimate birth as an obstacle to social advancement and to eradicate the stain of infamy from all forms of illegitimacy. Under the leadership of the Marqués de Pombal, reformer and defender of royal absolutism, the Portuguese state replaced canon law and the Ordenações Filipinas with *direito pátrio*, new legal principles that emphasized royal statutory law and the rulings of crown judges. The resultant changes in matters of inheritance, privileged the elite's quality over their condition of birth, and resulted in "surprise heirs," a group of illegitimate children who came to have the same rights as children born in wedlock.

The second volume of this work examines the changes that laws governing inheritance underwent after Brazilian independence. Using Brazilian parliamentary debates, imperial legal codes, as well as information on family arrangements and family values, Lewin shows how in the 1820s and 1830s liberal reformers worked to further break down distinctions between spurious and natural children and enact juridical equality. Paradoxically, when confronted with the need to clarify concubinage (*mancebia*), Brazilian legislators reenacted a more conservative definition of marriage and legitimacy in 1827. Although they would continue to work for legal equality of all heirs, eventually ending civil and ecclesiastical entail (*morgado* and *capela*), by 1847 the Senate greatly reduced the way that a father could recognize his illegitimate children, thus reinstating a more legally conservative vision of marriage, illegitimacy, and inheritance. Those who championed the eighteenth-century belief that good law mirrored existing social values now gave way to those who saw law as a way of changing those values.

These two volumes represent a major contribution to our understanding of how law relates to social realities, political agendas, and religious values. Moreover, Lewin's meticulously researched study is a sterling addition to a small but growing list of works that seriously address the social and economic effects of law in either the private or the public spheres.

Just as both women's historians and family historians had first to show that these were valid topics for research, colonial historians of homosexuality are in the early stages of research, intent on proving that there was same-sex sexuality in both Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Pete Sigal's edited volume, *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* reflects this research on at least part of the group.

All the authors concentrate on finding proof of sodomy either before or after the European conquest of America. Like many collections, this one is rather uneven. Some essays are well grounded in documentary evidence but because this path-breaking work is being done in a theory-friendly world, others are more strongly influenced by queer theory. Many of the authors are also faced with the Foucault conundrum. While most accept Foucault's axiom that sex is power, there are varying reactions to Foucault's dictum that homosexuality did not exist until the nineteenth century.

The existence and power of the "pan-American berdache," or feminized man, is the theme of essays by Michael Horswell and Richard Trexler. These two essays should be required reading for students interested in the use of sources and theory in history. Horswell's essay, clotted by "historical subjectivity," "performativity", "performative iterations," "ritual subjectivity," and of course "agency," approaches the berdache controversy by "underscoring the performativity of the subjectivity within a context of transculturation" (26). Determined to show that the existence of a powerful and respected "third sex" was widespread in the pre-conquest Andean world, Horswell attempts to achieve this goal by providing "a subtle reading of the colonial record" (26) informed by "current third-gender theory" (27). Horswell leads the reader through several gender theories, Quechua lexicon, Moche ceramics, twentieth-century Andean ethnography, Spanish chroniclers, and Guamán Poma de Ayala, before arriving at "same-sex praxis" (33). His lengthy discussion of same-sex relations is studded with "may haves," "suggestions," "coulds," and "mights." Admitting that he has little more than "discursive fragments of evidence," (33)(a rather generous interpretation of his material), Horswell argues that because "the feminine was not devalued in the Andes," (44) male temple sodomy was a positive practice. He concludes that he has uncovered information that will allow future generations to "develop a new appreciation for gender diversity" (59) while correcting Spanish "hegemonic discourses" (59).

The Horswell and Trexler essays are clearly in conversation with one another, a conversation that is far from amiable. Their exchange also echoes the victim versus empowered individual debate seen in women's history. Trexler, who is responding to both Horswell's work and Will Roscoe's *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), is a more reasoned author. He is in command of the sources and scrupulously avoids wild and unfounded claims. Continuing his earlier work on the berdache in Mexico and the Andes, he sees these castrated or tranvested individuals as "neither counselors nor politicos" (76), but rather as captured warriors or children forced into sodomy by powerful lords so that they could later be used as sacrificial victims or prostitutes. He points out that feminizing the captured and the weak is a universal behavior, not one limited to indigenous culture. Furthermore Trexler finds that pre-conquest Andean women were not powerful, respected figures, but rather a group so mistreated, that even the conquering Spaniards believed indigenous society to be misogynistic.

Pete Sigal's essay on Maya homosexual desire is by far the most difficult reading in the collection. Centering on Maya pederastic political rituals described in the post-conquest Books of Chilam Balam, he uses Lacanian theory to analyze the language of ritual while never clearly deciding if the language was only symbolic or perhaps a description of actual practices. He does find Maya sexualized imagery giving way by the eighteenth century to a more Catholic vision of sodomy as sin.

The essays by Ward Stavig, David Higgs, Luiz Mott, and Serge Gruzinski concentrate on the post-conquest period, all illustrating cases of male same-sex activities as well as the reaction of Catholic religious authorities. Stavig discusses the view of indigenous peoples in the Andean highlands on sodomy, suggesting that while there might have been cultural and regional variations, the attitude of pre-conquest rulers and commoners is unclear at best. He also finds that while Spanish culture found sodomy to be a nefarious sin, at least in one case both the Church and the law refused to punish individuals because of inconclusive evidence.

Higgs reports that the archive of the Portuguese Inquisition is full of denunciations, investigations, and trials of sodomy, but his essay concentrates on the trials of two Carmelite friars (one in the seventeenth and the other in the eighteenth century). In the earlier case, Frei Antonio Soares confessed to being sodomized at age fourteen by a priest, and then, after entering the novitiate, having an active sex life (hundreds of sex acts with multiple partners) with other elite young men. Punished by exile to Brazil, he was protected by the superior of the Rio convent and became a wealthy man and convent prior before returning to Lisbon. In contrast, Frei Thome Coutinho, president of the province and a leader of convent reform in eighteenth-century Rio, was denounced by his fellow friars for sodomizing slave boys. His punishment was demotion and banishment to a farm owned by the convent.

Mott goes further than Higgs, arguing that there was a self-identifying gay culture in Lisbon, Rio, and Pernambuco by the late sixteenth century. He believes that the Portuguese in Brazil were greatly influenced by both the indigenous sexual culture and "the sexual anarchy of African slaves" (168), and finds Brazilian sexuality to have been more "liberal, heterodox and sadistic" (169) than that of other Europeans, although he has no concrete evidence for either of these generalizations. Indeed, according to Mott, homosexuality was very much present in the colonial "imaginary" (as was a strong homophobic streak supposedly linked to machismo). But more than the "imaginary," Mott also documents a 1593 Inquisition case that uncovered a network centering on the shoemaker, Andre de Freitas Lessa, "the biggest closeted sodomite of all colonial Brazilian history," (183) who was sexually active with at least thirty-one adolescent boys, but Mott never raises the issue of victimization introduced by Trexler.

Lessa's punishment was banishment and a ten-year sentence as a galley slave. Far harsher was the punishment meted out to those brought before the Inquisition in mid-seventeenth-century New Spain. Gruzinski discusses one case, and the official attitude toward sodomy as well as the geographic, ethnic, and social origins of the 123 accused men. He finds that artisans, servants, slaves, food producers, and students made up the majority of the group. Like Mott, Gruzinski discusses frequent sexual contact and a well-developed subculture while emphasizing that those involved were aware of the serious consequences should they be discovered performing the "nefarious sin." Of the fifteen Mexicans accused who were successfully apprehended by the authorities, fourteen were burned at the stake.

Higgs, Mott, and Gruzinski all based their articles on Inquisition records. In this sense they are similar to Few's work. But each of them is far more thorough in analyzing their material, and none claims to be working with all the material available. This in turn raises the question of whether the cases under consideration are unique or representative of other Inquisitional materials. In other words, were there other cases in which large numbers of sodomites were called up before the Inquisition or were these documents singular? The same problem is also present in other works under discussion: both Gauderman and Myers fail to give us an idea of the entire corpus of material that they might have worked with (how many vidas, for example, does Myers believe were written, and how many are extant?), thus making it difficult to judge the validity of any generalizations they present. A related issue is that of comparative context. Several of the works under discussion make no attempt to consider the relationship of the local picture they are studying to larger, empire-wide patterns. Are Inquisition records throughout Latin America full of sorcerers and sodomites? Are the Guatemalan sorcerers described by Few similar or different from female sorcerers elsewhere in Spanish America?

Lack of information on how representative a finding may be is linked to still another weakness in some of these books, which is the tendency to generalize from one case. To cite two of many possible examples, Few pictures shops as "a prime space for practicing sorcery" but her one example never makes it clear if the sorcerer entered the shop (104). Gauderman, again on the strength of one example, tells us that "poor women also possessed notarized dowry contracts" (32). Moreover, Few, Horswell, and Sigal hypothesize yet fail to provide convincing evidence, eventually leading to the enshrinement of the unproven. A "may have" in one paragraph becomes a proven statement in the next and then enters the literature as a fact, to be cited by others as an undeniable historical truth. Furthermore, while Myers and Lewin consider change over time, several other authors assume that attitudes remained constant. Some of these books suffer from an overly politicized agenda. *Infamous Desire* provides the discerning reader with a clue when the editor dedicates the volume "For the activists . . ." Analyzing this statement (or as some of the authors would say "deconstructing this discourse"), this reader can think of two possible interpretations: the less probable one, that by "activist" Sigal is referring to the more masculine homosexual role, and the more likely case, that Sigal is dedicating the book to gay activists, those on the forefront of political and social movements for gay rights. The dedication leads one to wonder if what follows are dispassionate studies or exhortations for gay pride.

This presentist agenda is also obvious in Gauderman and Few. Empowering women, especially poor Indian and mestiza women in seventeenth-century Latin America, no doubt reflects each author's wish for today's poor women to take charge of their lives. But does history driven by a political agenda and influenced by the latest theories produce any valuable knowledge about the past? As Trexler warns, the "search for positive identity is too often transformed into a false understanding of the past" (88). Trexler also calls for "straight" historians to work in gay and lesbian history, but we wonder how welcome they would be. If Gauderman's treatment of Stern and Boyer is any example, they will probably be greeted as warmly as some women's historians greet their male colleagues. Lastly, in these days of rampant revisionism, we expect few works of scholarship to stand the test of time. But perhaps authors should take the advice given to me years ago by a good friend and consider whether what they are publishing today is something that has the context and depth to stand the test and time and be what they would want their name associated with ten years from now.