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Richard Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico*

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Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico. By Richard Boyer. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. x + 340 pp. Illustrations, map, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth.)

Richard Boyer has researched and written the most important book on the Mexican Inquisition published in the last twenty-five years. It sheds new light on marriage, family, and community in colonial Mexico gleaned from painstaking research in manuscript sources. He examines 216 bigamy trials over the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and his careful and probing analysis of data contained in the *procesos* recreates a colonial society that cannot be found in other sources. Laying out his methodological framework in a perceptive introduction, he proceeds to examine bigamy and the Inquisition, family and upbringing, marriage and married life, and the flow of information gleaned from the trial records. Each chapter includes conclusions to be drawn from the raw data.

Boyer's approach is to place the trials and the bigamists into the web of colonial society. Family history, vivid glimpses of courtship, loss of virginity, marriage, adultery, and abusive treatment shine through the trial procedures and give glimpses of daily life, devotion, and recreation. Boyer suggests, and rightly so, that perhaps only a negligible number of bigamists came before the Holy Office of the Inquisition, and he tells us that none of the culprits were burnt at the stake, even though harsh punishments were often meted out to those convicted. He concludes that bigamists "should be seen not mainly as victims, heroes or martyrs, but as ordinary folk making choices and carrying on day by day" (p. 292). Boyer's interpretations in this book fall into the general view, held by many, that the posture of orthodoxy was permissive rather than rigid.

Boyer's data base includes several interesting tables identifying bigamists by race and analyzing bigamy in the eighteenth century as racial and class differences blurred. There is an appendix with a sample of 216 bigamy files from Mexico's Archivo General de la Nación and an excellent bibliography which is reflective of the author's command of the monographic literature. This is indeed a distinguished book.

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