

manuscripts but the authors are to be commended for not having broken the continuity of the originals. Just as Benjamin Keen found the account of Mexico rich in descriptive information, so I have found many passages on Canada invaluable in providing either the earliest description of certain characteristics of native life and customs or confirming information which was deduced from some other uncorroborated sources.

In addition to providing an English translation of relevant passages of *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557), *La Cosmographie universelle* (1575), and *Les Vrais Pourtraicts et Vies des Hommes Illustres* (1584) the authors have laboured over the unpublished manuscripts of *Le Grand Insulaire* (1588), and of *Description de plusieurs isles* (1588), *Histoire de deux voyages* (1588), *Fragments sur les Indes occidentales et le Mexique* (n.d.), and *Second Voyage dans les Terres Australes et Occidentales* (1587-88) which had gathered four centuries of dust in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The editors have succeeded not only in making Thevet better known but also in illuminating some of the obscure circumstances of early contact. Social historians will be gratified for a well-edited collection of documents, set in historical perspective, which contributes to both our enlightenment and enjoyment.

Cornelius J. Jaenen
University of Ottawa

* * *

Pieter Spierenburg — *The Spectacle of Suffering. Executions and the Evolution of Repression: From Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. Pp. xii, 274.

Pieter Spierenburg has written a provocative essay relating attitudes towards public punishment to the development of the modern state that will generate much discussion, in part because the work is more suggestive than conclusive. The genesis of the work may explain in large part its unorthodox structure and inchoate character. One suspects that the author began with a more traditional case study of crime, criminality, and punishment in Amsterdam between 1650 and 1750 and then extrapolated therefrom. But the case study — which constitutes approximately one-third of the entire text — does not contribute substantially to the author's argument. If anything, its results attenuate the forcefulness of the thesis advanced in the remainder of the work.

The Spectacle of Suffering is, above all else, a history of changing mentalities rather than a history of a system of control. It focuses on evolving notions of what society considered undesirable behavior and how it dealt with such actions. Spierenburg consciously follows the course charted by Norbert Elias, who asserted in *The Civilizing Process* (originally published in 1939, first translated from the German in 1978) that changes in individual behavior were intimately related to changes in human organization, specifically the political organization of preindustrial society. Repression, like many other events in life, formerly had a more open, public character. Its "privatization" occurred concurrently with other developments, notably changing attitudes toward death and the rise of the domesticated nuclear family. Whereas Elias relied heavily on the French experience in his explanatory model, Spierenburg emphasizes not so much the centralization of an individual state as the wider phenomenon of the rise of a European network of stable, integrated state, be they republics or monarchies. In the early modern period, punishment incorporated the element of publicity and the conscious infliction of physical suffering. Monarchs and oligarchs alike valued public executions because they underlined the power of the state and emphasized its monopoly of violence: "They were meant to be an exemplary manifestation of this power, precisely because it was not yet entirely taken for granted" (p. 201). The dynastic and patrician states of pre-industrial Europe made a display of repression because they simply "could not afford to hide it partly behind the scenes and to individualize it" (p. 80). The authorities had usurped from private individuals the right to vengeance and

demonstrated their power by using it. According to the same argument, the spectacle of suffering survived until a degree of stability and internal pacification was reached, beginning in the late eighteenth century. Only in the following century, when ruling elites felt secure enough in their positions, would the authorities dispense with such ostentatious displays, which many members of their own class had come to consider vulgar and barbarous — unworthy of a “civilized” society.

The crux of such an argument lies in identifying the mechanism of change. In a brilliant summary, Spierenburg states that the process began among members of the European aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie, some of whom developed an aversion to public punishment in the seventeenth century: “The relative pacification reached in the early modern states cleared the way for the appearance of domesticated elites. The psychic changes which they underwent first found an expression in a refinement of manners and restraints in social intercourse” (p. 204). At first they regarded only their “psychic controls” to lower social groups. The result of this first phase was the disappearance of torture and of the exposure of corpses in eighteenth-century Europe. With the stabilization and integration of the nation state in the nineteenth century, Spierenburg asserts, “Public executions were not only felt to be distasteful; they were no longer necessary” (p. 205). When Césaire Beccaria argued in 1764 that effective crime prevention depended more on the certainty than on the severity of punishment, he essentially was calling for the kind of stronger state and police force that were finally achieved in the next century. Only after internal pacification had been guaranteed could recourse to *raison d'état* safely be abandoned and the liberal principles of law and authority be instituted.

Whereas Elias documents the early stages of this transformation in mentality by examining works of literature that revealed the thoughts and attitudes of the ruling elite, Spierenburg imaginatively examines the behavior displayed by various groups touched by the spectacle of suffering to ascertain their attitudes towards repression. In the first chapter, he traces the slow transition from private retaliation and reconciliation to the assertion of the Kings Law or an equivalent concept in municipalities. The emergence of the office of executioner, examined in the second chapter, was directly linked to the growing monopolization of violence by the state. The populace initially regarded the executioner — the most visible symbol of the state's authority — with hate, fear, and awe but gradually came to view him more neutrally by the eighteenth century. As shown in the third chapter, those who organized the public spectacles of scaffold punishment staged them in public places in town and exposed the corpses along the roads for those newly arriving to show that the place was indeed a city of law. In fact, the gallows themselves were symbols of civil authority: friendly forces were obliged to salute them, and attacking armies sometimes began their seige by cutting them down. Broadsheets and pamphlets further contributed to the exemplarity so valued by the authorities. But even between 1550 and 1650, revulsion against mutilation increased and its practice declined.

In the fourth chapter, the author examines the spectators' reactions to public punishments. Preindustrial people — children and adults, rich and poor — were familiar with executions, and even inhabitants of rural areas were likely to witness the spectacle at least once in their lifetime. But only upon one occasion in eighteenth-century Amsterdam did an execution provoke a popular disturbance. On this issue (and others) Spierenburg disagrees sharply with Peter Linebaugh and Michel Foucault, who argue that the danger posed by crowd control was a major factor in the disappearance of public punishment. “When the authorities gave in to the situation in the nineteenth century,” he emphasizes, “it was because their conceptions of justice had changed” (p. 108).

Spierenburg interrupts the flow of this argument with a long chapter that examines the crimes punished on the Amsterdam scaffold, the social identity of the delinquents, and the evolution of punishment between 1650 and 1750. The author bases this more traditional study on approximately 3,000 sentences executed during a century of political stability, when the system of public punishment went unquestioned. The results are of interest to specialists and non-specialists alike, especially the descriptions of offenses such as “undressing children,” which usually involved young woman luring rich children into secluded spots and stripping them of their valuable clothing and articles of adornment for resale. Otherwise the findings are hardly controversial, save for the discovery that the number of trials decreased while the intensity of repression actually increased after 1710.

The author is at pains to explain this trend, which seems to run counter to his argument that steadily increasing political stability should have led to a more self-assured and less vindictive ruling class. Rising and falling rates of recidivism and criminal activity, economic and demographic fluctuations, and the growing professionalization of the magistracy all had little effect. Spierenburg concludes that the most plausible explanation for the increased severity of the judges is the process of "aristocratization" under way among Amsterdam's patriciate, which was transforming itself from a bourgeoisie into a semi-aristocracy and adopting French models of mentality and behavior. He speculates that since this elite increasingly felt itself aloof from the lower classes, it unconsciously became harsher towards law-breakers: "It is only natural that changes in the nature and severity of punishment should reflect changes in the relations between social strata" (p. 180). He draws a parallel with eighteenth-century England, where repression became harsher as the ruling aristocracy became involved in the consolidation of its position after the Glorious Revolution. Such short-term fluctuations, he stresses, occurred within the longer-term development towards the decline of public punishment and should not detract from the persuasiveness of the overall thesis.

Granted that we accept this *caveat*, the reader cannot help but wonder at the inclusion of this extended discussion of crime and criminality in what is otherwise an extended essay on the inter-relationship between political processes and changes in mentality. Although the author has published elsewhere on the subject of "aristocratization," one also wonders why he did not explore in more depth the process by which various European elites came to feel secure enough in their power to call for a halt to public punishments. In the final chapter he does return to this theme and traces the discrediting of public punishment and its eventual abolition in the nineteenth century. Although he discounts the concept of "humanitarianism," he does admit that "inter-human identification had increased" and argues that the social distance between elites and delinquents came to be narrowed (184). The real nature of the shift in sensibilities lay in the fact that the suffering the elites wished to avoid was primarily their own. What changed was that more members of the audience came to feel more acutely the pain of the delinquents on the scaffold.

In sum, *The Spectacle of Suffering* leaves the reader intrigued yet puzzled. Spierenburg's long digression into crime and criminality in Amsterdam adds little to his analysis of the evolution of repression. More importantly, it distracts him from the more essential task of analyzing the mechanism by which changes in human organization relate to the development of mentalities. As a result, the reader is stimulated and grateful to the author for sketching the outlines of the transition and pointing towards avenues of future research, but disappointed that he was unable to marshal sufficient and appropriate evidence to accomplish his stated goal in publishing this work.

Steven G. Reinhardt
University of Texas-Arlington

* * *