

ular with fairgoers, and remains a must-see icon at many state fairs today.

Why create art from food, instead of applying oil to canvas or sculpting marble or bronze? Simpson rightly characterizes corn palaces, grain art, and butter sculptures as “icons of abundance” (xvi, 111, 181, 190, 195) that tangibly displayed the Midwest’s agricultural prosperity. As she observes, using food to create art was downright wasteful—and thus attested to the Midwest’s status as America’s breadbasket, capable of producing bin-busting harvests.

Simpson also acknowledges that midwestern boosterism concealed some misgivings. In an era when agriculture was being transformed by technological and economic change, icons such as King Corn, grain murals, and butter cows harked back to a Jeffersonian ideal that was rapidly vanishing. Perhaps a bit more attention to this nostalgic yearning for a vanishing world would balance the boosters’ irrepressible optimism that predominates in Simpson’s account.

*Corn Palaces and Butter Queens* succeeds in recovering the history of neglected art forms and rescuing grain palaces and butter cows from what historian E. P. Thompson called “the condescension of posterity.” Grain murals and butter sculpture are not mere curiosities. Treated seriously by an accomplished art historian, corn palaces and butter cows really do offer “a broad and unique index to the ideas and attitudes” of the turn-of-the-century Midwest (xv).

*Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890–1960*, by Michael A. Rembis. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011. x, 227 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Joan Gittens is professor of history at Southwest Minnesota State University. She is the author of *Poor Relations: The Children of the State in Illinois, 1818–1990* (1994).

*Defining Deviance* examines the records of the Illinois Reformatory for Girls in Geneva, focusing on the persistent inequitable treatment of girls in the juvenile justice system over the 70 years from 1890 to 1960. Girls were most frequently brought to court for sexual misbehavior, a charge rarely made against boys. And although there were many fewer girls in the system, they were incarcerated at much higher rates than boys. Even when accused of rape, boys were less likely to be incarcerated than girls for much less serious charges. Girls modern readers would unequivocally classify as victims—those who suffered incest, rape, or other forms of abuse—were incarcerated and subject to all the rigors of reformatory treatment.

Michael Rembis's interest is in the girls assessed as "feebleminded," in the language of the early twentieth century. This was a staggering number of the Geneva population, according to their longtime superintendent, who declared 85 percent of her charges to be feebleminded. The period from the 1890s through 1915 was the heyday of the eugenics movement, and the Geneva superintendent was an enthusiastic believer, one of many in Illinois. In the early twentieth century it was generally assumed that most delinquents suffered some degree of mental impairment, but it was girls the eugenics crusaders saw as the greatest danger to society. It was confidently asserted that feebleminded women produced far more children than other women, a direct threat to the eugenicists' program of "better breeding." The solution was to institutionalize these young women for life, or at least for their childbearing years.

The triumph of the eugenicists in Illinois was the involuntary commitment law that was passed in 1915, enabling the state to institutionalize those considered unfit. There were some civil liberties protections within the law, but few of those protections worked for girls already placed at Geneva. They were examined, using the Binet intelligence tests deemed the last word in scientific accuracy. The tests confirmed what eugenics advocates already suspected: a sizable portion of the Geneva population should never be released but should instead be transferred to the state institution for the feebleminded permanently.

The eugenics craze began to fade after World War I, but the modifying of outright eugenic ideas did not have much impact on the treatment of delinquent girls. They were still incarcerated at rates far exceeding those for boys and were routinely examined for mental deficiency. Some of the most interesting and poignant material in *Defining Deviancy* is the description of those tests from the point of view of the girls, who did their best to negotiate what was both a terrifying and momentous experience. They attempted to mitigate poor responses by explaining that they were badly educated, very nervous, or worried about their families. Rembis notes how consistently those assessing the young women underrated or ignored the traumatic experiences that so many of them had had prior to their arrival at Geneva. Environmental factors, he insists, were never given equal attention to a foregone conclusion that there was something biologically impaired about the subjects.

After World War II, the emphasis shifted away from what was by then called mental deficiency, but, for the population of delinquent girls, this was a shift in approach, not an abandonment of the biological diagnosis of their problems. In the neo-Freudian climate of the

1950s, the girls went from mentally impaired to emotionally impaired or “maladjusted.” But they were still incarcerated at much higher rates than boys and, in Illinois, at four times the rate of girls in Boston. And the harsh environmental circumstances of their lives were still under-emphasized in favor of a psychological analysis rooted in biology.

Rembis is writing a disability history, an important effort in a new field. But his use of theory is excessive, and his theoretical jargon is distracting, diminishing the power of the story. *Defining Deviance* treats a fascinating subject, raising important questions about the malleability of psychological categories to suit the needs and anxieties of the times. Using case studies from the Geneva Reformatory allows Rembis to give voice to the girls themselves, the most compelling part of the book. The historical material in general is engaging, the result of careful and thoughtful scholarship and a spirit of fairness in his assessment of his historical subjects.

*Picturing Illinois: Twentieth-Century Postcard Art from Chicago to Cairo*, by John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012. xiii, 232 pp. Illustrations (mostly in color), notes, credits, index. \$32.95 hardcover.

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The heyday of the postcard, from 1900 to 1930, occurred alongside cultural fascination with urban modernity, whose themes—efficiency, progress, industry—translated effectively to the mass-produced form. With their size and cost inviting visual and verbal terseness, postcards created iconographies of place that functioned as visual shorthand for the complexities of Chicago’s urban culture and the Illinois hinterlands. In their visual tour, John Jakle and Keith Sculle follow this upstate-downstate divide, examining streetscapes, factories, and buildings as both real and idealized landscapes.

Interpretive essays bracket two illustrated sections devoted to Chicago and “downstate,” respectively. The preface legitimates the postcard as a window into cultural expectations about landscape; the introduction and epilogue provide interpretive lenses through which to read the postcards. They highlight themes such as urban monumentalism, “self-congratulation” through narratives of progress, and geography as a record of historical change (5). Identifying Chicago as a