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## Review of Pol Dalmau, *Press, Politics and National Identities in Catalonia: The Transformation of La Vanguardia, 1881-1931*

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**Dalmau, Pol. *Press, Politics and National Identities in Catalonia: The Transformation of La Vanguardia, 1881-1931*. The Cañada Blanche/Sussex Academic Studies Series. Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2017. xv 259 pp. + 10 ill.**

Despite being told that press histories were passé at an academic conference in 2007, such studies have long been a vital part of historical research on Spain since Pedro Gómez Aparicio's path-breaking *Historia del periodisimo español* in 1967. Pol Dalmau's *Press, Politics and National Identities in Catalonia* is a well-written, concise, yet thorough look at the leading Catalan daily newspaper from the mid-Restoration to the beginning of the Second Republic. More specifically, Dalmau follows the fate of the Godó family as they guided *La Vanguardia* from its origins as a political party mouthpiece to its birth into a source of news and information for the masses that became the largest circulation paper in the country. Dalmau is concerned with the Godó's as symbols of the "press oligarchy" and liberal elites and how they attempted to maintain social and political leadership even as the masses were becoming increasingly educated and politicized. His book situates the family's efforts to maintain their social and political position of leadership in Catalonia in the larger historical context of the "Crisis of Liberalism" during the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the first third of the twentieth century. Dalmau's aims to revise the way historians have typically interpreted the various crises of liberal states in Europe with the Godó's and *La Vanguardia* as his case study. His argument is that liberal elites were able to exercise their social and political power for a longer period of time by using daily newspapers to influence mass opinion by helping to create and attempting to direct that complex entity known as public opinion. Dalmau is largely successful in this effort due to his deft touch in combining Catalan and Spanish primary sources of information with secondary sources gleaned from elsewhere in Europe (primarily British, French, German, and Italian historical and press studies).

Dalmau elaborates his story via an introduction, seven chapters, and an epilogue that total 198 pages of relatively fast-paced text. The introduction reconciles two separate strands of research on periodicals: historians' work that mostly employs the press as a source of information, but not an entity with agency, and media scholars who do not often integrate press transformation into broader political history (3). It also presents the Godós and *La Vanguardia* and entwines that history with the broader history of press and politics in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Europe. The key to understanding the European liberal elites during this period is that they wanted to exercise "politics without democracy" and they were swimming against the tide of political democratization sweeping Europe at the time (6). Thus, elites had to find vehicles to combat the democratic challenge of the masses typified by the growing professionalization of

politics and the continuing independence, popularization, and professionalization of the press. Chapter One recites the founding of *La Vanguardia* in 1881, the humble beginnings of the Godó family, and their rise to prominence in Catalonia. The newspaper was initially the mouthpiece, or vanguard, for the Constitutional Party that was eventually coopted by Sagasta's Liberal-Fusionist Party during the Restoration. It also develops the origins of modern journalism as a transnational effort that combined professionalization of reporting with changes in the organization of language, content, and format that exemplified mass consumption by emphasizing entertainment over political content (45). *La Vanguardia* was a leader in providing and highlighting international news, which led to steadily increasing circulation numbers and rising respect as a source of news and information. In 1888, partly as a result of the Godós failed efforts to gain political office and sufficient influence within the Liberal Party, *La Vanguardia* was launched as an independent, commercial newspaper. Chapter Two focuses on the now familiar identification of newspapers with patriotic causes, particularly in wartime. The Godós advocated for a larger presence of Spain in Morocco via *La Vanguardia*'s pages by coming out in favor of the short-lived War of Melilla in 1894. The decision to do so symbolized changes newspapers were undergoing in terms of content and direction, from partisan press to business orientation and the persuasion and influence of public opinion. According to Dalmau "it was about attracting new readers and making profits, but also about endorsing private interests while doing so" (70). The third chapter develops that theme further by elucidating the Godó family's business interests in Spain's remaining trans-oceanic empire (Cuba, Puerto-Rico, and the Philippines). *La Vanguardia* advocated expanded trade policies and later, in the face of Cuba's War of Independence and the eventual Spanish American War, pro-war sentiments that, simultaneously, served national, patriotic, and family interests. Chapter Four reveals how defeat in 1898 forced further changes in newspaper operation as liberal politics, and the newspapers that supported them, were discredited in the aftermath of the war. Defeat demonstrated that influence was reciprocal and the public held more power than newspaper owners and editors might have imagined, especially when many newspapers collapsed due to plummeting circulation. The mediatization of politics and the Godó family response is the primary topic of the fifth chapter. The new mass politics was accompanied by a public concern for political corruption. Therefore, the Godó's newspaper ownership and political ambitions and offices became incompatible in the public's mind and forced the family to abandon politics, preserving the paper's credibility in so doing. Chapter Six further explores the way liberal elites were forced to adapt to the new mass politics as the institutions they counted on to maintain their social and political influence were transformed by rising popular authority and increasing democracy. Chapter Seven explains the expansion of *La Vanguardia* into the largest circulation newspaper in Spain

between 1905 and 1920 and the maneuvering of the Godó family to save their position, and their newspaper, as Catalanism and semi-revolutionary labor politics converged in Barcelona. The epilogue wraps up the story of the Godó's and *La Vanguardia* with the death of Ramón Godó Lallana (1864-1931) who had piloted the family and the newspaper through the more tumultuous moments of their personal and national history, re-emphasizing the elements of the story that are illustrative of the way European elites accommodated the changing social and political circumstances prompted by the crisis and eventual demise of classic liberalism.

Pol Dalmau's study is a penetrating look at the inner workings of an elite family trying to maintain power in the face of transformations that threaten to diminish it. It also is a revealing examination of how the objectives of newspapers changed, professionalized, and modernized in general and as instruments of elite socio-political influence. Dalmau adroitly and succinctly tells a complex story that is fascinating, entertaining, informative, and makes a significant contribution that will appeal to scholars of press studies in Spain, Europe, and elsewhere.

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