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Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815-1848*. Montreal and Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. xiv + 245 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical references, and index. \$49.95 Can., \$39.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7735-2580-7.

Review by Michael A. Osborne, University of California at Santa Barbara.

Provoked by the purported scientificity of R. J. Herrnstein and C. Murray's *The Bell Curve*[1] and the racial intelligence rankings of an Ontario psychologist, J. Philippe Ruston, Martin S. Staum has produced a highly readable and well-argued examination of the early social sciences in France. This history of scientized social pessimism elaborates on a topoi of racial hierarchies and the tools and techniques used to construct these rankings. Writings by the members and patron saints of three post-Napoleonic French scientific societies, the *Société phrénologique de Paris*, the *Société de géographie de Paris*, and the *Société ethnologique de Paris* provide the main sources for analysis. The scale of the book ranges widely, perhaps too widely, from the individual, to the social unit, to the nation state, to metropolitan and colonial relationships, and finally to the place of France and the French within the economy of nations.

After the Revolution as before, French scholars and reformers pondered the proper form of society. Emboldened by implications of the science of physiology, itself just then gaining specificity, Restoration writers of all persuasions wrote much on the social organism, its proper care, its laws, and governance. The utopian philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon and many early phrenologists and ethnologists found inspiration in the ideas of the anatomical pathologist, Xavier Bichat, a leading light of what historians of medicine refer to as the Paris clinical school. But whereas Bichat had written of the body as composed of some twenty-one different tissues (each with its own specific functionality and kind of life) and of intelligence as being separate from organic life, the social scientists drew comparisons between the well-functioning biological individual and the well-constructed society. Social organicism has a long history,[2] and Staum astutely notes: "With Bichat, variability in organic disposition became a signal that no one person would excel in all capacities. The only answer for a productive society, therefore, was specialization in which the naturally talented would rise to the top. On a world scale, Europeans would be the global brains, at the head of economic development, while other peoples might attain guidance to climb the ladder of being or advance through the several stages of development. In a harsher view, however, some would always remain uncivilizable" (p. 21).

For Bichat, individual tissues might be distinguished by dissection, observation, feel, and perhaps how the specimen reacted to various chemical reagents. But how did post-Napoleonic practitioners of the protodisciplines of phrenology, geography, and ethnology construct races and then classify peoples? Staum provides a selective review of the heterogeneous racial discourses of the era and situates enigmatic figures such as Julien-Joseph Virey and J.-B.-G.-M. Bory de Saint Vincent within debates over climatic and cultural determinism, the scientific status of Johann Caspar Lavater's physiognomy--a reading of facial features--and the likelihood of the monogenetic or polygenetic origin of humanity. In such a multitude of issues, the rather simple measurement of facial angles said to be correlated with intellectual capacity (with higher angles being typical of Europeans and lower angles typical of orangutans and Africans) became "... a cornerstone of racial theory, a choice tool for geographers and explorers interested in reporting the advanced or retarded nature of peoples of Africa and the Pacific" (p. 29). First promoted by the Dutch anatomist and artist, Petrus Camper, the zoologists Georges Cuvier and Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire lent support to the technique and classified apes with it in 1795.

Confusion persisted over the status of physiognomy, as well as the newer technique of phrenology, a measuring of different regions of the skull and the localization of brain functions and mental faculties promoted by Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim. Phrenology, rather less popular in France than in the United Kingdom, was neither a highly unified scientific or medical specialty nor did it long endure. It did not, inevitably, lead to the

construction of racial hierarchies although this genre of public anatomy, like earlier forms,[3] captured the popular mind. The anticlerical physician François-Joseph Broussais drew 3,000 listeners to his course on the subject in 1836, and four years later about 4,000 people in the naval port of Toulon viewed plaster busts of the peoples of the Pacific region.[4] Gall's theories came to support racial prejudices, but he himself rejected facial angle measurement and was not a knee-jerk advocate of European intellectual and moral superiority. On balance, the social program of the phrenologists, like that of the Saint-Simonians, stood against revolutionary change. Phrenologists promoted their art as a tool of expertise to be used in the service of social cohesion and for the diagnosis and moderation of the passions threatening the social fabric.

In 1821, a veteran of Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, Edme-François Joamard, the Danish geographer Conrad Malte-Brun, and sundry others, founded the *Société de géographie de Paris*, the most enduring of the three societies examined by Staum. Commercial, utilitarian, and strategic interests as well as scientific curiosity informed their activities. Like the phrenologists, the geographers, too, contested the means by which racial hierarchies might be constructed, debated just how groups of peoples might be ranked, and whether or not non-Europeans might be amenable to improvement through education or constrained by their nature to remain in states of savagery. A growing archive of ethnographic information, some of it collected as a result of France's incursion into Algeria after 1830, now challenged the racial theories of Cuvier and Bory de Saint-Vincent. Crucial, it seems, were the findings of naval surgeons who collected ethnographic information and took many facial angle measurements of Pacific and Oceanic peoples. By the 1840s, many members of the geographical society had adopted "... either a polygenism postulating unequal potential for human development or a monogenism in which racial characteristics are difficult to modify" (p. 117). The logic of both positions, of course, argued against any complete assimilation of colonized peoples by the French nation. Also present were the rudiments of a civilizing mission, a discourse most often associated with the Third Republic.

The *Société ethnologique de Paris*, founded in 1839 as a forum for antislavery activities, provides a third group for study. Later, the anthropologist Paul Broca--and historians who have read Broca's institution-building rhetoric with a rather uncritical eye--would portray the ethnological society as an ephemeral prelude and counterpoint to Broca's more substantial *Société d'anthropologie de Paris* founded in 1859. Yet ethnological society members displayed a range of racial theories and a variety of perspectives on empire and race. Some held to a polygenism born of the separate creation doctrine of various races; others were moderate monogenists or clung to varieties of organicist Saint-Simonian social ideas. Staum is skeptical, as others have been,[5] of attempts to disassociate the activities of ethnology from physical anthropology and to read racism as becoming ever more scientific. He points to the groups' shared concern over the perfectibility of the races and the malleability of types. Both groups bolstered cultural, ethnological, and even physical anthropological rationales for European racial superiority and continued domination of non-European peoples.

Salient lessons emerge from Staum's analysis. On balance, this is a history of continuities rather than ruptures and one where science rarely, if ever, clarifies directions for social policy. The book's careful historical argumentation rejects the simplistic Foucauldian power/knowledge tropes and homilies of much scholarship on race, racialism, and scientific racism. The emergent French social sciences addressed race, racism, imperialism, and many other issues frequently associated with late nineteenth-century thought.[6] Their social programs prefigured solidarism and other philosophies of social cohesion. Thus the revolutions of 1848, and two perceived watersheds of 1859, the founding of the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris* and the simultaneous appearance of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, while important events, may not have been the conceptual blockbusters or epistemological thresholds they were once thought to be. As regards current debates on how ethnicity limits or enables social and intellectual futures, the statistical correlations of *The Bell Curve*, while no doubt indicative of disparities, fail miserably, as did the earlier "sciences" of physiognomy, phrenology, geography, ethnology, and physical anthropology, to clarify the relationships between nature, nurture, and race. A considerable achievement of historical scholarship, the volume has exemplary production values and merits speedy translation into French. I would hope it might provoke productive scholarly responses from francophone audiences as did the late William B. Cohen's benchmark volume of 1980, *The French Encounter with Africans, 1530-1880*. [7]

- [1] New York: Free Press, 1996.
- [2] Judith E. Schlanger, *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1971).
- [3] Anita Guerrini, "Duverney's Skeletons," *Isis* 94 (2003): 577-603.
- [4] Marc Renneville, *Le langage des cranes: Histoire de la phrenology* (Paris: Institut d'Édition Sanofi--Synthélabo, 2000), p. 25.
- [5] Waltraud Ernst and Bernard Harris, eds. *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960* (London: Routledge, 1999); Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds. *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- [6] Christian Topalov, ed. *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle: La nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880-1914* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1999).
- [7] Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, reissued 2003.

Michael A. Osborne
University of California, Santa Barbara
osborne@history.ucsb.edu

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