

## BOOK REVIEWS

**John Carson.** *The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750–1940.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 422 pp. \$39.50 (cloth). ISBN-13: 978-0-691-01715-0.

No other area of psychology displays the linking of scientific projects to the social order quite as strikingly as the investigation of intelligence. It is hardly surprising that this area has attracted the attention of historians of science who are interested in exploring such links. Indeed, some of the best modern work in the history of psychology has centered on this topic. We know a great deal about the origins of intelligence tests, their role in World War I, the history of nature-nurture debates, controversies about the unitary nature of intelligence, and so on. Do we need another monograph devoted to these and related topics? Well, we certainly need the kind of study that John Carson presents in this book.

As its subtitle indicates, this volume examines two cases, the French and the American. In other words, this is a work of comparative analysis, which means that the truly characteristic features of each case emerge much more clearly than they might have done had the study confined itself to one case only. This more distanced view enables Carson to put into perspective a vast array of relevant scholarship (the reference notes run to more than a hundred pages) and to identify the issues at stake in historical developments that were mostly divergent in spite of a fundamental convergence.

Choosing France and America for comparison is far from arbitrary. First, there is the well-known historical contingency that links the American industrialization of intelligence tests to their prior invention in France. Carson breaks with a linear historical tradition for which the French contribution is essentially that of curtain raiser for the main event. Instead, he pays as much attention to French as to American developments, both before and after Binet and Simon's first attempts at measuring something called "intelligence." No one can do that without being struck by the irony of intelligence testing's lack of success in the country of its origin. A careful exploration of this massive divergence between the French and the American case leaves little doubt about the factors at play: the requirements of very different educational and military systems and contrasting cultures of expertise being particularly prominent.

Although the chapters that deal with these matters will be of most direct interest to psychologist-historians, the earlier chapters should not be neglected. For it is in these that Carson supplies not only a comparative view but a historical depth perspective for topics that are too often seen purely through a twentieth-century lens. This perspective reveals a more profound link between the French and the American cases, the common dilemma of justifying the unequal distribution of resources, power, and opportunity in supposedly egalitarian societies. Meritocratic answers to the problem go back to the late eighteenth century in both societies, often expressed in a language of human "talents." In a fascinating analysis, Carson traces the transformation of these notions into the concept of a singular, biologically based, measurable intelligence.

In twentieth-century America, this concept acquired enormous cultural significance and provided major opportunities for professional advance as well as theoretical debate. The French had little use for it, relying on well-entrenched institutions to do the job of sorting people and distrusting the pseudo-objectivity of the testing apparatus. "French and American psychologists, in the end, created distinct versions of intelligence" (p. 233), providing Carson

with the material for presenting what is probably the best researched case of the mutual constitution of the psychological and the social order. In view of the fact that other psychological concepts are as much products of history as “intelligence,” this book may well come to play an exemplary role.

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*Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 44(2), 181–183 Spring 2008  
Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com). DOI 10.1002/jhbs.20263  
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**Alan Sica and Stephen Turner (Eds.). *The Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties*.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 368 pp. \$62.00 (cloth). ISBN-10: 0-226-75624-6.

Sociology, social theory, and the 1960s, are intimately linked in twentieth-century intellectual and social history. The connections and the tensions between the most politically left-wing academic discipline, a broad and historically rich intellectual tradition of social theory, and the decade and mythology we call the 1960s, is explored creatively and usefully in this excellent collection of autobiographical essays pulled together by two prominent social theorists of the generation shaped by the events of 1968. Alan Sica and Stephen Turner were able to gather together an impressive list of influential scholars born between 1944 and 1952 to produce a collection of essays that is useful for intellectual historians and entertaining for students, scholars, and general readers.

We live, the editors remind us, in an era in which the public (even the academic public!) is fascinated with autobiographies, celebrities, and personal confessions. The editors clearly did a substantial amount of hands-on work ensuring that the authors of the chapters made a serious effort to rise above the self-promotion of listing publications and the narcissism of telling personal stories that do not connect to the larger theme of social theory and the 1960s. We will focus on issues raised by Andrew Abbott, Michael Burawoy, Erik Olin Wright, Stephen Turner, and Saskia Sassen to help us think about the larger experience of 1960s' generation.

The Abbott contribution is a model for what can be accomplished in such autobiographical pieces. Abbott's essay succeeds because he uses the sociological skills he developed over the years as an empirical researcher to do an analysis of the social organization of the draft. Abbott, of course, had once set the agenda for the study of professions for a generation of sociologists in his path-breaking *The System of the Professions* (1988). Most of the other essays in the book discuss the draft, but Abbott uses his experience in writing about professions to undertake an analytic discussion of the social processes that sent the poor, the principled, and the unlucky to Vietnam, allowing others to establish themselves successfully in careers and families without risk of death, injury, and the trauma of war. Any serious discussion of the idealism of the 1960s generation must surely take into account the ugly and complex realities of how the draft operated as a zero sum game—for every person who got out of the draft, another was required to go to Vietnam.

If some of the 1960s generation can be accused of avoiding dangers and risks, that certainly cannot be said of Michael Burawoy, the former American Sociological Association