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Irish famine scholarship for understanding of present-day famines, and studies of Dublin during the Famine and of the experience of Famine emigrants in New York. “Mass Migration as Disaster Relief” (co-authored with Kevin H. O’Rourke) most clearly illustrates how econometric history of the Famine has developed over the past two decades. In *Why Ireland Starved* (London, 1985), Joel Mokyr (co-author of two of the articles in the book under review) had displayed a dazzling array of hypotheses for Ireland’s plight, alongside ingenious methods for testing them with data aggregated to the level of counties (of which there are thirty-two in Ireland). Disappointingly, however, these methods failed to yield definitive results, over and over again. By turning to data at the level of baronies (327 smaller administrative units), Ó Gráda and O’Rourke are able to produce models that make sense of demographic changes between the 1841 and 1851 censuses. This willingness to go beyond the most accessible data is the key to Ó Gráda’s econometric success. Whether it is coding ten times as many observations of aggregate census data, poring through the records of the Encumbered Estates Court, or drawing a sample from the admissions register of the North Dublin Workhouse, Ó Gráda has been willing to do the historian’s tasks that allow him to take full advantage of his econometric skills.

Ó Gráda’s work, however, goes beyond the disciplines of history and economics. He takes advantage of his fluency in Gaelic to exploit folklore materials that document how the Famine was remembered by later generations. The fact that he can pose the hardnosed questions of the economist and also discern the meaning of bitter, even if inexact, popular recollections makes Ó Gráda’s contributions to the highly charged debates about responsibility for the tragedy especially worthy of attention. He is also at pains to identify ways in which the Irish Famine can shed light on present-day famines as well as to point out problems in applying our understanding of modern famines to those in the past. For Irish historians from the generation of this reviewer, the book also offers a special treat—a revealing history of the government-sponsored centenary history of the Famine that was supposed to appear in 1945 but did not appear until 1956.

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The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750–1940. By John Carson (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006) 401 pp. \$39.50

Virtually every American over a certain age knows that the Stanford-Binet test provides a numerical assessment of something called “intelligence,” and most can tell you what their “I.Q.” is. Few French men and women have even heard of Alfred Binet, let alone realize that he was the

inventor of the test. By the time of his death in 1911, he himself had largely lost interest in applying it. This irony lies at the heart of John Carson's remarkable book.

Carson's project is nothing less than to explain how the world's two oldest democracies came to grips with the problem of social inequality in polities arising from revolutions that abolished "artificial" social hierarchies and proclaimed equality for all. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen laid the groundwork for the solution in 1789: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded upon the general good." The general good required that excellence in all aspects of life be nurtured and that leadership by the most able be allowed to flourish. The idea was that each individual's talents should not be impeded by any barrier other than the limits of his or her own ability. In short, economic success; academic, scientific, and artistic achievement; political and administrative authority; and social position had to arise from a single standard—merit.

Carson's principal task, admirably pursued, is to survey the history of ideas, increasingly classified as "scientific," that underlay the evolution of education's efforts to clear the pathways of merit and provide equality of opportunity (or not) in France and the United States from the eighteenth century to World War II, the point at which he believes each nation's standards were thenceforth set. The central question is, What is "intelligence" and how can it be measured? Carson's main concern—and target—is the American mania for standardized tests, not only of intelligence but of "achievement" as well. France's educational history operates as a foil for his central story, though he does not make the mistake of viewing it as any sort of democratic model. But since the United States and France were sharply divergent in this context, attention to the French way might be a rewarding pursuit for U.S. policy-makers.

American philosophy of mind and psychology had, by the twentieth century, embraced a unitary notion of intelligence (without ever really attempting to explain its constitution) as something that could be measured and assigned a number, whereas the French—despite the later nineteenth-century triumph of positivism and Binet's pioneering efforts to codify differences in individual intelligence—continued to view intelligence as a multivalent array of capacities. The dominant thread of American psychology viewed intelligence as largely inborn and inheritable, but the French gave greater weight to the possibility of tapping potential talents among the disadvantaged through proper training and encouragement, as their arguments for affirmative action attested. American opponents of affirmative action called upon SAT scores to justify their cause.

Carson shows brilliantly how this outcome was reached, beginning with an overview of Enlightenment philosophy of mind and the dilemma posed by "natural talent" in a new polity based in "natural rights." Race and gender differences were raised immediately, but at that

point, the only response to Condorcet's logic of full access to equal opportunity for all was a reversion to essentially theological or "natural" social-role arguments like those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹ In both countries, new educational systems arose from their revolutionary experiences. The French version was highly centralized. It stressed the training of a (male) elite through a system of rigorous competitive examinations, theoretically open to all classes. It culminated in state-sponsored *grandes écoles* reserved for the best students and teachers. Crucially, a student's measure of success came in the form of a qualitative assessment by experts. The American system was largely the opposite of the French—decentralized, highly democratic in the lower levels, and largely private and expensive in higher education.

Both systems produced elites that could claim to be Thomas Jefferson's "aristocracy of talent," though in reality most came from higher levels of wealth and social status in the first place. In the earlier nineteenth century, the reigning philosophies of mind—Victor Cousin's eclecticism and American-style Scottish common sense—glorified "character" and justified the middle-class ascendancy. Call it *émulation* or competition; those who rose to the top deserved it.

The invasion of "natural" science into the field began with an examination of why certain people, especially certain groups, did not measure up and why they needed to remain subservient and/or "protected." The mania for measurement began with the head; Carson's treatment of scientific racism on both sides of the Atlantic is excellent, if standard. France and America differed little in methodology, but greatly in purpose. Racial science demonstrated the superiority of Europeans and their right to rule, though the French deemed non-Europeans improvable via "la mission civilisatrice." In America, racial science simply legitimized inequality.

The high tide of scientism in psychology was reached at the turn of the twentieth century—the point at which Carson's most original and telling analysis begins. Despite the triumph of positivism during the early Third Republic, which was matched in the United States, French psychology, led by Emile Durkheim, moved away from it, along with the notion that intelligence was quantifiable. At this very moment, Binet discovered a test that could supposedly measure intelligence scientifically, but it drew little attention from his colleagues. America, however, embraced it. Lewis Terman created the Stanford-Binet scale, and in 1916, convinced the U.S. military to administer the test to 2 million recruits. In the 1920s and 1930s, I.Q. took the nation by storm with the inevitable results—schools "tracking" their students, parents wringing their hands, industrial psychologists making personnel decisions, and psychology becoming all the rage. Academic testing, well beyond the Stanford-Binet test, turned into a big business, and test scores provided the criteria for everything from academic admission to school funding.

1 On this issue, see Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988), 96–98.

Meanwhile, in France, experts still read written exams, and the grandes écoles winnowed the elite.

Carson tells this story with clarity and insight, though he might have broadened his canvas. In explaining why this great divergence remains, he rightly emphasizes the efficacy and the institutional power of French education and the cultural reaction against positivism after 1900 that the mechanical idiocy of World War I confirmed. The situation was different in the United States. White males felt besieged by the jumble of races and ethnicities knocking at the door of opportunity. What better way to restore their confidence than to institutionalize a culture-bound test deemed “objective” on which they would score higher? Although the tests have been refined, their consequences preserve inequality. Heavy reliance on measurable criteria has ramifications far beyond education, however, affecting the economy, government policy, ecological debate, notions of cultural worth, perceptions of urban life, and so on. Unlike the United States, Europe has largely eschewed rampant quantification as a means of social control, with positive results for the health of its societies.²

Carson would have been well served to ruminate more deeply on the larger causes of this difference. Nonetheless, his study is comparative history at its best and its message fundamental. Quantitative versus qualitative assessment of merit in education lies at the very heart of current national debates; the political choices made will profoundly affect our future.

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Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republic France. By Elinor Accampo (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 336 pp. \$50.00

Accampo’s biography of Roussel, an unorthodox feminist of the French Third Republic, is first-rate. Roussel has international significance as the first feminist to make birth control an issue and arguably the only one since her era to attempt integrating the issue with feminism rather than positioning it as a matter of public health or pragmatic family economics. Roussel’s campaign was not simply to spread the word about birth control in a nation that already had a notoriously low birth rate and a powerful pronatalist movement accustomed to invoking patriotism for public support. Accampo keenly analyzes the deeper moral positions that made Roussel a controversial figure even among progressive reformers.

Roussel’s campaign was partly defensive, aimed at countering the pronatalist propaganda encouraging women to have large families. Her

2 For a timely overview, see Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream: How Europe’s Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (New York, 2004).