

GEORGE WEISZ — *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. xiii, 397.

In the wake of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Ernest Renan penned an explanation for what Émile Zola and other contemporaries well termed "le débâcle". Renan attributed the military catastrophe to the inferiority of French education, particularly scientific education, and castigated the Catholic Church and the defunct Second Empire for promoting unquestioning obedience rather than free inquiry in the educational process. Specialists in French history have long been interested in the combat between republican and clerical politicians and educators over the Ferry Laws (1881-82) for primary education, and Françoise Mayeur has recently explained how the legislation creating secondary schools for girls (1880) fits into that scenario. Higher education aroused less bitter battles, and most recent studies of it have discussed only fragments of the institutional or curricular picture. Now George Weisz has provided a well researched and comprehensive synthesis to place alongside *L'Enseignement supérieur en France, 1789-1893*, authored nearly a century ago by administrator Louis Liard.

The familiar theme of Third Republican political, ideological, and nationalistic motivations for educational reform was, according to Weisz, just one part of a triad of reasons for altering higher education. First came the push from academicians within the existing system who wished to enhance their own professional status, their vulnerability having been exposed during the political repression of the 1850s. In turn, politicians' desires to compete successfully with Germany helped provide powerful allies. To emulate the German university emphasis on research, Victor Duruy, education minister from 1863 to 1869, founded the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*. After the Republican victory in 1877, the higher education budget rose by 80 percent between 1877 and 1880. Reform-minded academicians and politicians also funded the *Société de l'Enseignement Supérieur* in 1878. Finally, once launched, the process of reform was affected by economic changes, increased public demand for advanced education, and the concerns of special interest groups.

To place the story of interactions between academicians, politicians, administrators, businessmen, and assorted pressure groups within an historical context, Weisz first surveys higher education before reform. "Modern" comprehensive universities did not exist in France before a law of 1896 provided for a new combination of existing facilities. Instead, under the administrative structure created by Napoleon I, *grandes écoles* (such as the *École Polytechnique*, *École Normale Supérieure*, *École des Mines*) trained the nation's military, technical and intellectual élite, while Parisian and provincial faculties of law and medicine prepared professionals in their respective fields. Faculties of letters and of science did little more than conduct examinations for the secondary baccalaureate. The reformers' emphasis on faculty productivity in research and on training future researchers would enhance professorial status. Not surprisingly, after 1896 the weight of tradition helped perpetuate rivalries between institutions — most notably universities versus *grandes écoles* — and preserve Parisian predominance. Thus older judgments rated the reform either a failure or one without practical significance. Weisz disagrees, but he revises with care and nuances, not dramatic overstatement: "university reform after 1878 would seem to have been as successful as any incremental reform with limited public support could ever be" (p. 376).

Scholars pursuing research on aspects of French higher education will long make Weisz's book a starting point because of the variety of topics treated and the careful linkage of each one to a bigger institutional, political, and socioeconomic picture. Within ten chapters and thirty-six tables one finds quantitative information and discussions relating to increases in the numbers of students and professors; the social origins of pupils of the *grandes écoles* and universities; increases in professors' salaries and publications; comparisons between French and German spending on higher education or between academicians' status in the two countries; Paris's continuing role as the higher education mecca for the nation (46 percent of all students in 1876, 41 percent in 1914) but also the strides made by vigorous provincial universities such as Lyon, Lille, Nancy, Grenoble, and Toulouse; and the marked growth after 1900 in enrolments of women (3 percent in 1902, 10 percent in 1914) and foreign students (15 percent in 1914), two "newer" clienteles clustered especially in the least

prestigious university sector, the faculties of letters. Between 1865 and 1919, the size of university professional staff went up by more than 380 percent, but student enrolment rose by 420 percent and the amount spent per student actually declined by 50 percent between 1896 and 1913 (pp. 13, 316, 319). With public funds limited, administrators such as Liard, the education ministry's director of higher education after 1884 and a leading reformer, encouraged faculties to seek funding from local interests who could be persuaded that specialized technical training provided by universities would benefit them economically. The discussion of private educational philanthropy helps modify — but is not intended to nullify — familiar stereotypes about the central government's predominance in all levels of public education. This theme also helps explain why Weisz, building on the work of historians of science like Harry Paul, rates the technical institutes developed by science faculties as the most successful innovation of the reform period.

Combining the methodologies of the historian and sociologist, Weisz has described, analyzed, and quantified many important facets of his subject. Some readers may be disappointed by the lack of extensive discussion of leading personalities or of student life. Weisz's explanations of how professional, political, social, and economic interests combined to promote change are sensible, but these structural explanations could have been amplified by more coverage of the role of individuals other than Liard in the complicated process of reform. Finally, while Weisz touches on all areas of university curricula — including the introduction of sociology and the growth of political economy — he spends more time discussing the achievements of scientists than of historians, philosophers, or specialists in language and literature. This emphasis is probably due not only to an attempt to document reformers' efforts to match Germany's scientific achievements but also to the existence of substantial recent monographic material produced by French, British, and American historians and sociologists of science. Omissions or minimal detail on some topics notwithstanding, the verdict remains that Weisz's synthesis is important, useful, rich, and readable and is not likely to be surpassed in the near future.

Linda L. CLARK
Millersville University of Pennsylvania

* * *

SEAN WILENTZ — *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. Pp. xiv, 446.

Imaginatively using an 1815 panorama and an 1865 photograph as framing, and epigraphs from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as shoring, Sean Wilentz has skillfully crafted a fine history of the rise of New York City's working class in the period when that city developed to become first, by 1825, the pre-eminent mercantile centre of the United States and then, by mid-century, the nation's leading manufacturing city and metropolis. While the book's focus is on workers, their leaders, their opponents, and the development of what E.P. Thompson has called "class ways", its contexture includes the broader political, social, economic, intellectual, and religious history of the city and, to a certain extent, of the nation. Based on painstaking research in original and secondary sources and presented in a clear, sometimes dramatic, narrative style, the work has a structural soundness not seriously impaired by some inevitable imperfections. Wilentz tells his story of New York's workers with empathy, but he neither idealizes nor pities them: rather he shows them with their strengths and weaknesses in a society with its own strengths and weaknesses. Much of the ground he covers has been covered before (and he freely acknowledges his debts to those who have influenced his own work whatever the degree of his acceptance of their conclusions), but probably no other historian has dealt with his subject matter with such comprehensive analytical perception.