

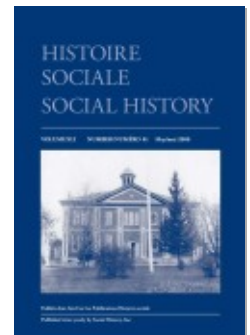


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Du vrai au juste. La mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli
(review)

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Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

BAUSSANT, Michèle (dir.) — *Du vrai au juste. La mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006, 199 p.

Following a century characterized by two world wars, a protracted Cold War, and decolonization, as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is perhaps appropriate that historians and other scholars should now be turning their attention to the question of memory. The legacy of the destructive twentieth century looms large in the minds of many people as they search for ways to confront a past dominated by oppression and colonization in a manner that recognizes the reality of these experiences, but also allows them to move forward. How much of that past should be forgotten? How much of it should be remembered in the search for justice and reconciliation? How do populations that have suffered at the hands of oppressive regimes re-establish trust in their former tormentors? These are just some of the questions at the heart of this new collection of essays brought together by Michèle Baussant. The result is a particularly rich global overview of the various ways in which people are coming to terms with the legacy of the last century.

It is useful to remember that, for many people, especially those who cannot point to a single moment or event, symbolic or otherwise, when the injustices associated with the past can be said to have made way for a more just present, the past remains firmly embedded in their everyday lives. For some, like the indigenous people in the Mexican state of Chiapas who continue to suffer from discrimination and poverty, the present appears little removed from the oppressive past. Frustration in Chiapas reached a boiling point at the beginning of 1994 when many indigenes rebelled against the Mexican government. Interpreting this rebellion as an act of public disorder, Mexican officials responded with force. This confrontation, Martin Hébert demonstrates, pitted Mexican officials who sought to dissociate the present, and themselves, from the past against a segment of the population that continued to live with the problems, such as discrimination and poverty, which were the legacies of that past. The Mexican government sought to diffuse the situation by offering to pardon the rebels if they abandoned their revolt. But the rebels responded angrily, suggesting that they were not the ones who should be pardoned for standing up for their rights within a system that they claimed perpetuated the discrimination and injustice

of the past. This was a confrontation, Hébert shows, between a state striving to forget the past and a population not quite willing to see the state as divorced from the oppressive past.

The sense that the state remains culpable for past crimes even after oppressive regimes have been replaced very often arises because of the feeling that state officials have not adequately confronted that past or established sufficient distance from it by instituting policies that would end persistent discrimination. Resentment persists even when there is a recognizable moment that cordons off the past. If officials move forward without fully dealing with the past, they can make the victims of past regimes feel forgotten. By failing to recognize the larger society's role in past atrocities, and in seeking to establish too much distance from the past, the state risks appearing as part of a cover-up and being associated with these atrocities. This is the case in Romania, according to Cristian Preda, following the overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989. With the death of a dictator comes the temptation to turn a horrific past into an anomaly and to blame any atrocities on a particular individual. Isolating the past and failing to recognize the state's culpability, however, as Mexican officials attempted to do in 1994, can produce feelings among victims of being victimized all over again.

Of course, figuring out the appropriate means of dealing with past injustices requires some agreement over just who constitutes the victim. But what if the victim remains poorly defined and unacknowledged? Such was the case until the 1980s for the Gypsies who had been struggling to secure recognition as victims of the Nazi Holocaust on the grounds that they were members of a defined group, and not because they were deemed socially undesirable as individuals. In an interesting article, Véronique Klauber notes that evidence showing that some Nazis did indeed define Gypsies as a "race" has helped pave the way for such recognition. But this evidence also raises a number of questions about the desirability of relying on categories established by one's oppressors in order to secure recognition as victims.

This collection brings together very different experiences, connected by astute commentaries that draw links between different circumstances. Francine Saillant, for example, compares the experiences of Algonquians living in Quebec and Afro-Brazilians by looking at how both groups have dealt with their pasts according to the manner in which they navigate public space. While these commentaries make some valuable connections between different experiences, this collection reminds us of the risks of approaching these experiences in a homogeneous manner. The essays in this collection also emphasize that the questions of memory do not simply deal with victims of past oppressions. This point becomes abundantly clear when one considers the continued struggles by the Canadian state to deal with its legacy of colonialism, as well as the French efforts to come to terms with the bitter legacy of the Algerian War. This collection goes a long way in reminding us that the traumas of the past can be kept alive

through the veil of forgetfulness behind which many people hide. It is also a stark reminder that history is rarely simply about the past.

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BECKER, Peter, and Richard F. WETZELL (eds.) — *Criminals and Their Scientists: The History of Criminology in International Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 492.

While a relatively new academic discipline, the science of criminology dates back to at least the early nineteenth century. This volume of stimulating essays on the theory and practice of criminology originated from a 1998 conference on the history of criminology. All 21 essays adopt a case-study approach to revealing the nuances within the competing discourses on who was a “criminal” and the best methods to punish offenders and curb the outbreak of crime and deviant behaviour. Of these, the majority (17) focus on Eastern and Western Europe, notably Germany. The remaining four chapters address the emergence of specific facets of criminology in Argentina, Australia, Japan, and the United States. This primarily Euro-centric emphasis clearly detracts from the “international perspective” of the book. Moreover, the collection deals almost exclusively with the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century to 1945.

Criminals and Their Scientists attempts to uncover “every active participant in the discourse on crime and criminals” (p. 3). In so doing, these essays help to further our knowledge and understanding of the role played by so-called experts, or “competent men” (p. 3), in the social construction of the criminal as a “class apart” (p. 5). These experts included welfare and police officials, jurists, medical practitioners, psychiatrists, and philanthropists. All of their views of criminals fit within Foucault’s power/knowledge paradigm, which meant that the subject of their expert gaze, “the criminal,” was stripped of personal identity and reduced to a social problem that society loathed and these “competent men” could apparently solve. Indeed, their expertise allowed many of these men to achieve professional prestige and the clout to influence criminal justice policy in several countries. However, while espoused as a key organizing principle of this volume, the power/knowledge paradigm is utilized rather unevenly throughout the book and to limited effectiveness in terms of unraveling the dynamic between criminals and their scientists.

This collection, a co-publication of the German Historical Institute, is organized into four parts. Underpinning each part is the impact of Cesare Lombroso’s seminal work, *On Criminal Man*, upon the study of the extent to which the criminal is born or made. Similarly, each author endeavours to place his or her analysis of the birth of criminology, along with the production, dissemination, and implementation of criminological knowledge, within the appropriate historical, intellectual, social, and political contexts. While not every essay accomplishes