

John M. Burney — *Toulouse et son université. Facultés et étudiants dans la France provinciale du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1988. Pp. 330.

This book is more than a history of one university; it is a good introduction to the history of higher education in the provinces in the nineteenth century. And it is the result of more than the usual Franco-American cross-fertilization: this work began as an American university dissertation, carried out under French guidance in Toulouse, and, then, written in English. University of Toulouse Professor Jacques Godechot suggested the topic to John Burney after having proposed it, in vain, to his French students. The completed dissertation was subsequently translated into French by another eminent Toulousain historian, Philippe Wolff.

The University of Toulouse was the second oldest university in France, founded in 1229, and the largest provincial university in the nineteenth century. Burney covers a period that has not been treated before in any language — the period from the post-revolutionary rebuilding of the university under Napoleon through the turn of the century. His account synthesizes the best of recent historical literature on French higher education, in English and French, while adding archival details from sources in Toulouse and Paris.

Important though the Faculties of Toulouse were in the Southwest, they were deep in the provinces and could not compete well with the top schools in Paris for the best students, faculty, or resources. Toulouse also had to compete with rival towns in the region — above all, Montpellier and Bordeaux. Centralized authority in the capital long kept the Faculties starved for resources.

In its long-standing Napoleonic form, the University of Toulouse had no effective unity — not even a semblance of it before 1896. Until the restructuring of that year, the Faculties of Law, Letters, the Sciences and the Medical School remained separate and autonomous, each under the control of a central administration in Paris. The Faculties all engaged in struggles for power and resources with Paris and city authorities, and in the process, they considered each other rivals. Appropriately, the author traces the history of each Faculty in three separate chapters before devoting three chapters to students. The chapter on the Law Faculty is particularly important. Law was the Faculty with the largest number of students — in large part because career possibilities for law graduates were most promising. The Law Faculty had a budget three times that of other Faculties, and its professors had more prestige and mobility.

Burney agrees with earlier studies that the quality of higher education before the reforms of the early Third Republic was generally dismal. Professors in Toulouse carried on little or no research in law and letters, although somewhat more in the sciences. Their main work was teacher training and administering examinations for baccalaureats and professional licensing. Through the year, they gave a small number of popularizing lectures for a generally sparse general public. Classroom buildings and libraries were woefully inadequate. The Faculty of Letters had no library at all until the 1840s.

Yet many professors participated in salons, local learned societies, journalism, and local politics. Many were eager for reforms. In the last decades of the century, victorious republicans and university leaders sought to enshrine their political and positivist ideologies and to consolidate rising social groups challenging an older aristocratic and conservative Catholic elite. The reforms of that era were complicated

compromises that allowed much of the old faculty structure to persist, but they did bring some improvements in teaching, research, and the level of student learning. Among the innovations were the introduction of more specialized courses, local interest courses such as Spanish studies, and new emphasis on applied science and technology. At the same time, new buildings were finally built. In assessing these fin-de-siècle changes, Burney builds on the historical writing of George Weisz without substantial modification.

Three chapters on the students discuss their origins, life, collective actions and organizations. Through almost the entire century, a preponderance of the students came from the upper bourgeoisie. The reforms gave more access to *petit bourgeois*, women, and foreigners. How much more? The evidence of those changes is meager (and social categorization debatable: should all rentiers be counted as *petits bourgeois*?). This important point is not fully developed. The book offers much fuller discussion of scattered incidents of students activism. In 1843, for example, malcontents threw projectiles at professors for giving them an examination containing bizarre, trivial questions. Students mounted most protests against attempts to make their education more rigorous. Sporadically, they protested over issues of national politics, but never developed durable organizations or a tradition of political involvement. Cafés, theater, dances, and charitable events were more often the focus of the new student associations that managed to take form. From the Napoleonic era on, the University administration stuck to a policy of severe repression of any unauthorized student organizing or collective action. Even after the reforms brought greater liberty, student associations were small and short-lived. Burney explains this pattern by citing the lack of a tradition due to effective administration repression, students' individualism, their personal enjoyment of freedom in the city, and their primary attachment to career concerns.

Burney's work makes it clear that a major function of the University of Toulouse was to shape and perpetuate a provincial elite, especially through law studies. It carried out this conservative function through the century under diverse political regimes. The assimilation of newcomers was limited, even under the Third Republic, officially committed to social mobility. By integrating elites and propagating the doctrine of individual liberty, the University contributed to social stability in ways particularly favorable to the already advantaged.

Although the focus is only one provincial university, that institution is placed in a larger context, and the scope of the book is large — even in the treatment of local university life. Certainly, big questions remain. Burney points out the need for further research into the university's economic role, for example. He has provided a good foundation for such future research. As it stands, his work leaves no doubt that the University of Toulouse had great importance in the region as a cultural center and training ground for regional elites.

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