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Olson, Kory. *The Cartographic Capital: Mapping Third Republic Paris, 1889-1934*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. 320 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. £85.00 (hb). ISBN 9781786940964.

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Third Republic Paris is well known for its ostentatious visual culture. The World's Fairs, the Eiffel Tower, and the Impressionists' brightly-colored paintings of Paris street life are just some of the sumptuous visual symbols of France's longest-lasting democratic regime. But not all of the Third Republic's visual history is flashy or eye-catching. In his new book, *The Cartographic Capital: Mapping Third Republic Paris, 1889-1934*, Kory Olson invites us to explore the history of Third Republic Paris through a visual genre that scholars often overlook: government-sponsored maps. While many of the urban plans in Olson's book appear at first glance to be banal and technocratic, Olson successfully demonstrates that we cannot understand the history of modern Paris without analyzing the transformative ideas expressed in these documents.

In analyzing maps of Paris as essential thinking tools for urban planners and their government sponsors, Olson makes a broader argument about the nature of political power in the Third Republic. Beyond the deadly violence that the Republic wielded when attacking ordinary Parisians during the Paris Commune of 1871, Olson demonstrates that the Third Republic also exerted a grinding, slow-moving, and harder-to-perceive form of domination over unruly urban communities through centralizing planning. While French political parties openly and loudly debated how to address the poverty, housing crises, sanitation issues, and transit problems that plagued modern Paris, Olson argues that maps quietly enabled the Republican government to proceed forward with its plans to bring about a calm, stable, and controllable urban environment that favored bourgeois prosperity over social equality. In formulating this argument, Olson builds upon David Harvey's *Paris: Capital of Modernity* and James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*, both of which emphasize the importance of top-down government planning and spatial organization to the solidification of power in the hands of moneyed elites.[1]

Olson begins his book by orienting the reader within the history of cartography specifically and the history of print culture more broadly. Picking up on a general trend among historians of cartography over the past twenty years, Olson calls maps "socially and culturally defined objects" (p. 20). Arguing that most of the cartographic images circulating in Third Republic France reinforced the rules of the social order, he calls the maps in his book "masculine bourgeois products" (p. 20). Bourgeois Parisian mapmakers, he argues, purposely left out spaces that did not pertain to their needs or worldview, noting that feminine spaces such as individual dwellings

were often left out of maps. In addition to their “silences,” maps, he argues, express their message through a complex semiotic language that combines text, color, scale, and orientation. As a result, maps offer scholars “many layers of textuality” (p. 24). While this methods-oriented chapter may be useful for French historians unfamiliar with the major interventions in map history, its in-depth positioning in historiography reads at times like a dissertation rather than a book. Much of this chapter could have been integrated into the introduction or the footnotes.

In chapter two, Olson turns to Augustine Fouillée’s well-known geography primer, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, in order to explore the question of how people actually read and used maps in Third Republic France. This chapter leads us away from Paris and takes us on a broader exploration of popular geographic knowledge across the entire French nation. Following the devastating loss to the Germans during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, many French officials blamed a lack of general geographic awareness for the military defeat. Geography, as a result, became a key pillar of Jules Ferry’s program to reform French public education. Together with reading, writing, and arithmetic, the ability to visualize and know the nation’s territory became a requirement in all French schools. This chapter thus contends that schooling was the main vehicle for increasing map readership, though it also acknowledges the role of commercial maps produced in civil society, such as urban guidebooks published by Hachette and sold at train station bookstores. While these are interesting points, this chapter strikes the reader as detached from the book’s main topic (and the focus of the remaining four chapters), namely the Third Republic’s urban plans for Paris.

The real heart of Olson’s book can be found in chapters three-six, each of which is nicely organized around a Paris urban plan from a distinct period in the Third Republic’s history. Chapter three focuses on Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand’s “Les Travaux de Paris, 1789-1889,” an atlas published in 1889 containing maps that present the spatial and technological evolution of Paris’s urban physiognomy from the French Revolution forward. In this chapter, Olson does an excellent job of demonstrating how maps reinforced the narrative of historical progress and technological achievement that was key to the Third Republic’s political platform. Just as the Eiffel Tower flaunted the Republic’s technological prowess to the rest of world, Alphand’s map revealed how the democratic government was improving urban infrastructure and bettering all neighborhoods. Especially successful in this chapter is Olson’s discussion of how Third Republic officials in Paris handled the legacy of Napoleon III’s authoritarian style of city government. For a purportedly democratic government, the task of building off Baron von Haussmann’s plans was a delicate issue. In narrating top-down urban planning as a form of “progress” rather than as a form of “control,” Alphand (who was trained under Haussmann) was able to commemorate the Revolution of 1789 while de-facto promoting the underlying quest for order in Napoleon III’s former plan. The end result was “a confident secure city” (p. 128) rather than a free and democratic one.

Chapter four turns from municipal plans to the development of the *Carte de France*, a map produced by the Service géographique de l’armée, the cartographic branch of the French Army. Here Olson picks up on a major theme that will run through the rest of the book, which is the question of how maps delineated or obscured the boundary between Paris proper and the outlying and ill-defined “Parisian region.” He is particularly interested in how the military depicted Thiers’ defensive wall as a barely-existing line that “had been finally neutralized, not only by modern warfare...but also by the increased commercial and industrial links between Paris and its suburbs” (p. 155). Even though the wall was not torn down until much later, after World War

I, maps had already begun to imagine a Paris without that wall, a blended space in which urban and suburban communities were already entangled. Olson does note that map sheets from the *Carte de France* were sold to the public at large but he does not address how or why private individuals may have wanted to use the maps.

The last two chapters of the book focus on the interwar period, which marks a shift from the “big men” planners of the nineteenth century to the era of *urbanisme*, a multi-pronged approach to managing urban growth. First coined in 1910, the term *urbanisme* denoted a certain social science of urban reform that focused on creating healthy and hygienic housing and raising the living standards for Paris’ urban residents. Olson points out that in spite of its reform-minded mission, the post-war government focused on regulating and controlling suburban growth through a *plan d’extension* designed by Léon Jaussely in 1919 (p. 177). The large scale of this plan, Olson argues in chapter five, demonstrated government officials’ shifting focus from central Paris to the greater Paris region. In the visual language of the Jaussely map, inner Paris appears dwarfed by its surrounding regions which are covered with public transit networks, roadways, and canals that emphasize circulation and movement. Green zones pointed to healthy spaces where Thiers’ wall once stood, and blue waterways showed that Paris water was safe and healthy to drink. The map was also aspirational, allocating spaces for the aviation zones and car-racing tracks of the future (p. 209).

Jaussely’s ambitious city plan, however, was never fully implemented, leading the city to adopt Henri Prost’s more modest plan, published in 1934 and the subject of chapter six. Specifically designed to guide the *aménagement* of the Paris region, Prost’s plan aimed to improve access to the city, decongest the suburban ring and assure the viability of green spaces. It also highlighted the role of new autoroutes. For Olson, the plan “authenticates Paris’s newly enlarged shape” and shows how “Paris’s urban core loses its cartographic power as [Prost] shows the rising prominence of the region’s periphery” (p. 265). This chapter is particularly interesting because it shows the origins of today’s divided Parisian social geography. The iconic “red belt,” for example, had its origins in the industrial developments clustered around the outskirts of the city that Prost colored in red. Here Olson really excels in drawing a link between the map’s semiotic representation of the color red—a seemingly innocuous choice—and the growing perception of Paris’ suburban “red belt” as a hostile area that “represented what officials feared most” (p. 245).

While Olson’s careful analysis of government-sponsored urban plans should be applauded, his book does leave the reader wondering if there is any evidence of counter-mapping initiatives from citizens who opposed the actions of city hall. Olson admits that “Paris often represented a challenge to regimes in power” (p. 127) and that education and voting rights had created more active citizens in the Third Republic. Did citizens ever think up their own city plans and urban futures? They did, after all, have access to inexpensive printing technology and a rich network of civil associations. Addressing the urban visions of the *communards* from 1871 for example—specifically their idea for a more integrated Paris—would have allowed us to see how maps functioned as spatial thinking tools for a range of political groups. Even if counter-maps never had a tangible impact on the built environment, they still help to illuminate the larger role of utopian city planning in political discourse and contestation. The author’s tendency to focus solely on government-directed urban plans is further exacerbated by the general lack of attention to civilian or privately produced maps, which were in fact an essential part of the map market during the Third Republic. Studies such as Steven Harp’s *Marketing Michelin* [2] may have offered Olson a model for a more nuanced discussion of mapping urban space that allows for

contingency and compromise—a cartographic culture that involves a give and take of governments, businesses, and citizens.

Along these lines, Olson's book also could have benefitted from greater engagement with the field of environmental history. As Parisian engineers and city officials laid down their planned sewage systems, railway lines, and telegraph wires, what unexpected obstacles did they encounter in the material environment? Jeffrey Jackson's *Paris Under Water* [3] or Richard Keller's *Fatal Isolation* [4], for example, have explored how Parisian environmental disasters resulted from flaws in centralized urban planning. Olson could have also engaged more with urban environmental histories that focus precisely on the interrelationships between countryside and city, including William Cronon's Pulitzer-prize winning study on Chicago, *Nature's Metropolis*. [5] Though not explicitly an environmental history, John Merriman's *The Margins of City Life* [6] offers a discussion of the dynamic interplay between city and urban periphery that Olson could also have built upon.

These suggestions aside, Olson's book makes a unique and worthy contribution to the history of cartography and the history of modern Paris. It is a useful and readable text for anyone interested in Third Republic Paris who wishes to orient themselves geographically and spatially in the city's shifting physiognomy. Through Olson's careful analysis, we see how the map archive has much to teach us about the history of core/periphery relationships, boundary-making, and infrastructure development in modern Paris. The book should be of particular interest to researchers studying the contemporary Parisian *banlieue*, a geographic area whose fraught relationship with the French state has its origins in nineteenth-century urban planning. Broadly speaking, Olson's study demonstrates the relevance of spatial history for understanding current social inequalities, and why the construction and reconstruction of urban spaces demands our attention.

NOTES

[1] David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[2] Steven L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[3] Jeffrey Jackson, *Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

[4] Richard C. Keller, *Fatal Isolation: The Devastating Paris Heat Wave of 2003* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[5] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

[6] John M. Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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