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God's Eugenicist: Alexis Carrel And the Sociobiology of Decline (Monographs in French Studies)

Andres Horacio Reggiani

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"In this exemplary biography of the Nobel prize-winning surgeon Alexis Carrel, Andres Reggiani manages to provide a balanced account of a man whose life had much about it that was unsavory." · Bulletin of the History of Medicine

"This is a valuable study, then, for anyone interested in the histories of medicine and social policy, as well as the history of Vichy. But one of its chief attributes is to distance itself from the polemical comment which has labelled Carrel as a servant of Nazism and to locate the FFEPH more firmly within the history of social and economic planning in France." · Modern and Contemporary France

"...this book is very good scholarship: thoroughly researched, well-placed in a broader in a historical context, full of curious incidents and contacts (Lindbergh was a close friend)." · Robert Paxton, Columbia University

"This is a good and important piece of work that brilliantly brings together the social histories of an individual life, of science, and of ultra-right public policy. Also because of Carrel's unique careers in the US and France, this work does justice to the international connections of medicine, science, and public social policy." · Herman Lebovics, SUNY, Stony Brook

The temptations of a new genetically informed eugenics and of a revived faith-based, world-wide political stance, this study of the interaction of science, religion, politics and the culture of celebrity in twentieth-century Europe and America offers a fascinating and important contribution to the history of this movement. The author looks at the career of French-born physician and Nobel Prize winner, Alexis Carrel (1873-1944), as a way of understanding the popularization of eugenics through religious faith, scientific expertise, cultural despair and right-wing politics in the 1930s and 1940s. Carrel was among the most prestigious experimental surgeons of his time who also held deeply illiberal views. In Man, the Unknown (1935), he endorsed fascism and called for the elimination of the "unfit." The book became a huge international success, largely thanks to its promotion by Readers' Digest as well as by the author's friendship with Charles Lindbergh. In 1941, he went into the service of the French pro-German regime of Vichy, which appointed him to head an institution of eugenics research. His influence was remarkable, affecting radical Islamic groups as well Le Pen's Front National that celebrated him as the "founder of ecology."

Andrés Horacio Reggiani was Tocqueville Scholar and Visiting Professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. Currently he is Professor of European History at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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