

## Book Reviews

**Joyce E Chaplin**, *Subject matter: technology, the body, and science on the Anglo-American frontier, 1500–1676*, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. xiii, 411, £30.95 (hardback 0-674-00453-1).

Joyce Chaplin's learned and deeply nuanced book deserves a more illuminating title. "Subject matter" is an indeterminate term, while "Anglo-American frontier" intimates a study more concerned with how peoples interacted across some boundary than with focusing on English minds, her major interest. Although conversant with and informed by post-structuralist as well as ethnohistorical treatments of encounters between Indians and English "invaders", Chaplin critiques literary theorists (rightly) for exaggerating claims that European narratives about natives tell us only about their authors, and historians (perhaps not so rightly) for too often accepting Indian voices as authentic rather than ventriloquized. She weeds out quotations from natives if they parrot English depictions of nature while crediting remarks that writers, thinking them "absurd" (p. 28), included without comment, a likely sign, she avers, that the statements were in fact true. These methodological strategies inform a cultural history of how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English conceptualizations of their colonial project emerged from scientific thinking about human corporeality and artifice: "Early modern science provides the intellectual context that shows why the inhabitants of colonial America dwelled so obsessively and, ultimately, so divisively on bodies and technology" (p. 3). More than any other scholar, she locates English conceptions of empire within their discourse about Indians and the natural world.

Between 1500 and 1676, Chaplin maintains, the English overcame anxiety about their capacity to occupy the western hemisphere and match their European rivals' success, devaluing Indians to proclaim themselves *the* "natural" inhabitants of North America. This attitudinal transformation occurred in three stages. Worried

about their own technological backwardness, the English initially assessed Indians as substantially similar beings whose technical expertise they might glean. That judgement ebbed as settlers became more sanguine they could survive without natives' assistance.

Confidence in their ultimate mastery of the land derived critically from increasing appreciation of their own bodies, the instrumentalities by which they could out-populate all comers and the "springboard[s]" from which they "launched arguments" about the Indians' "technical" and "intellectual" inferiority (p. 322). Once experience proved that climate did not determine character to the extent earlier authorities had contended, colonists decided that they were better suited to life in America than were the Indians, a conclusion buttressed by the natives' escalating mortality rates. By the mid-seventeenth century, the scientific division of the world into animate and inanimate realms rendered native religions—earlier deemed spiritually cogent, albeit diabolical—into mere superstition, while shamans' failure to repel smallpox manifested the bankruptcy of their healing regimens. Virtually incapable of grasping European knowledge, medically helpless—their very bodies disproving their fitness for the environment—Indians could only cede North America to Albion's seeds, who had proved themselves far better adapted to denizen it.

Two themes, evocative but not entirely realized, course through the book. The first concerns race. The English landed on the Western Atlantic littoral neither predestined to regard natives as inferior to themselves nor ready to assume their full equality. By the late 1600s they had cobbled together what Chaplin calls a racial "idiom" (p. 276) that was not yet systematic racism. She convinces that colonists' location of Indians and themselves in the natural world contributed to this "idiom," but it is difficult to accord it primacy, especially since—disclaimers notwithstanding—she is really dealing with an educated élite rather than

with ordinary settlers whose greatest concern with Indian bodies often ran no farther than whether or not they still moved after having been shot. Moreover, any discussion of racism must include a thorough treatment of Africans, a topic necessarily beyond the book's scope. Her tale about race is at best half-told.

A second theme concerns the "transatlantic argument on the connection between the natural and imperial worlds" (p. 3). Colonists' sense of who they were within the empire took shape, as Chaplin documents, in conversation with metropolitans as well as aborigines, yet she never fully limns that identity, perhaps because her colonists correspond only with scientists and never with courtiers, bureaucrats, or merchants. We learn how seventeenth-century creoles imagined themselves inhabiting North America with (and over against) the Indians but not how they may have accepted (or, in some precincts, chafed over) Whitehall's definition of their "libertyes". An English colonist had always to think of the king's two bodies as well as his own.

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**Jordan Goodman, Anthony McElligott, Lara Marks** (eds), *Useful bodies: humans in the service of medical science in the twentieth century*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. vii, 217, £31.00 (hardback 0-8018-7342-8).

Over the past fifteen years, the topic of research on human subjects has attracted considerable interest among medical historians. Following on from earlier work on the notorious human experiments of doctors in Nazi Germany, historians have turned to the practices and ethics of human research in other periods and countries. Among others, we have now such studies on the USA before the Second World War (Susan E Lederer, *Subjected to science*, 1995), on nineteenth-century Germany (Barbara Elkeles, *Der moralische Diskurs über das medizinische Menschenexperiment*, 1996), and on France after 1945 (Giovanni

Maio, *Ethik der Forschung am Menschen*, 2002). Much of this work focused on the professional and public discourses on human experimentation, with a view to the issues of information and consent.

The present volume takes a somewhat different perspective. Providing seven case studies of British, Australian and US American human trials from the 1930s to the 1970s, this book's focus lies on the legitimating factors, especially the role of government committees initiating or overseeing such research. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the attitudes and justifications of individual experimenters. In the aftermath of the 1995 *Final report* of the President's Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, three case studies examine radiation research (uranium injections, radioisotope studies, atomic weapons tests), while the remaining four discuss experiments on malaria, jaundice and hepatitis, and germ warfare.

It is nowadays undisputed that any serious evaluation of past human experimentation must derive from its specific historical, ideological and social contexts. As the essays of this volume make very clear, however, there is no simple recourse to an earlier lack of risk perception or of ethical awareness. This is illustrated on several levels. As Margaret Humphreys shows in her study of Mark Boyd's research in the 1930s on malaria therapy in neurosyphilis patients in a Florida mental hospital, there was an obvious tension between his role as a physician and as a scientist. Jenny Stanton, in her contribution on the work of the British MRC Jaundice Committee during the 1940s, highlights concerns about risk, expressed by medical staff involved in hepatitis studies on experimentally infected patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis (who were believed to benefit from attacks of jaundice). Or, Glenn Michell, in his study of the "Indoctrinee Force", a large group of senior officers that was made to watch atomic blasts at Maralinga, Australia, in the 1950s, emphasizes curious differences between the assessments of safety given by scientific advisors in public and in private. Finally, Brian Balmer, discussing British large-area spray trials with non-pathogenic bacteria as part of a defensive