

Editorial Foreword

WESTERN UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER CULTURES. Humanism, surrealism, and area studies hold in common—the articles by Michael Ryan, James Clifford, and Carl Pletsch argue—a fascination with exotic societies used to satisfy the internal needs of Western society, a kind of intellectual imperialism that assimilates the experience of other cultures through distortions achieved in the search for theological or ethnographic or social scientific truth. This need to look at others and to explain (or explain away) their differences seems a fundamental part of European culture (see Jones, 13:4); so does the willingness to borrow from them (see Glick, 11:2, and Issawi, 22:4). Each of the three articles in this issue places its analysis firmly in the framework of European intellectual history, opening broad perspectives on lively questions that have been central in *CSSH*—questions of social science methods (22:2), of modernization (20:2), and of cultural conflict and perception (23:1). Indeed, by closely tracing the related themes through earlier editorial forewords one could connect a high proportion of the articles that have appeared in this journal since its inception. The third world Pletsch discusses seems to descend directly from the pagans of Ryan's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators. If the need to look at other societies and yet to see them ethnocentrically is a mark of our civilization, so—as these articles seem to demonstrate—is dissatisfaction at the result.

BEYOND SLAVERY. If anyone ever chose to list the all-time favorites of historical comparison, slavery might well place first, ahead even of revolution. As a legal institution, slavery creates formal definitions, elaborate social devices for its maintenance, and extensive record keeping—historical treasures few topics match. Offensive enough to require justification and peculiar enough to need explanation, slavery can never be seen, and especially not by modern eyes, as merely accidental or incidental. Although doomed, even its abolition is richly problematic. The social theories of the nineteenth century made much of its rise and fall, and the comparisons of systems of slavery, particularly in the Western hemisphere, have led to some of the most admired and influential works of this century, especially perhaps in the last few years. *CSSH* has, of course, actively taken part in these discussions (see Degler, 2:1; Finley, 6:3; Sio, 7:3; Klein, 8:3; Hill, 18:3); yet in these pages as elsewhere there has remained some dissatisfaction with the topic as a category of comparison. At first so readily identified, slavery quickly proves to be intricately locked into the society that sustains it and an awkward or even misleading category of comparison. Nigel Bolland takes up the problem of its abolition in the British West Indies, stresses the continuity that could follow its demise, and uses the

case of Belize to argue that the difference, or lack of difference, brought by legal emancipation depended not on the amount of land available but rather on the social controls elites could manipulate. Rejecting a simpler material determinism, Bolland's argument makes points similar to those of Somers and Goldfrank (21:3) and Richards (21:4). Slavery becomes in his analysis part of a continuum of labor systems, and something similar occurs in Richard Graham's dissection of the best-known comparison of all: slavery in Brazil and in the American South. It is the differences, local and regional—in connections to other economies, in crops exported, in social structure and values—that prove most illuminating. Having begun with slavery, Graham ends by calling for more research but on other topics. Comparison remains a fruitful tool for exploring Brazil (see Willens, 12:1; Katzman, 17:3; Lewin, 21:2) and Belize (Sanford, 16:4), a way of posing questions and clarifying old assumptions; slavery becomes more a place to begin than the thing compared.

MANAGING THE LABOR MARKET. Coal and strawberries, like pre-Communist China and contemporary California, suggest sharp contrasts; yet one expects the organization of labor even in those industries and those places to be affected in similar ways by changes in technology (note Brown on soybean processing in China, in the previous issue). These two studies by Tim Wright and Miriam Wells, however, demonstrate the importance of social attitudes and social structures, as well as their sensitivity in turn to the larger political context—a point both union organizers and employers have long recognized. In doing so, Wright and Wells develop some of the questions of labor supply raised by Morris (2:3), but contrast with Rimlinger's analysis of European miners (also in 2:3) and with Miller's emphasis upon the subculture of longshoremen (11:3). When conditions permit, employers appear likely to find at least short-term advantage in intermediary institutions that can circumscribe or diffuse the confrontations of management and labor.