

Editorial Foreword

PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY. History is no longer often written as the life and times of some central figure, as a leisurely and multivolumed pageant in which history's seamless webs meet to shape a single life that in its turn made history. Inadequate to current conceptions, that literary form had its advantages, including an emphasis on motive and on the contrasting perceptions of different historical actors. If George Wilson's experiment with a "motivational history," a history of "perceived intentions," thus has an honorable ancestry, it is nevertheless a very contemporary effort (one particularly practiced in France today and that is related to earlier attention to *mentalités*, see Burgière in *CSSH*, 24:3). Determined to avoid the restrictions of linear reason and suspicious of analytic abstractions, he seeks patterns less in the calculations of individuals than in the myths shared by groups. These myths are examined as narrative forms and cultural reality; their intersection becomes the process of change. Historians may admire continuity, but they like change; and Wilson tests his approach on a major transformation in modern Japanese history, the Meiji Restoration. The intertwining of changing social structure, religion, politics, and responses to the intrusion of Western culture—which became more visible around the world in the era of imperialism—has become a major theme of modern study. (This is especially true, perhaps, for the study of Asia, note Kuhn on the Taiping Rebellion, 19:3; Yang and Freitag on sacred symbols and political mobilization in India, 22:4; Obeyesekere on the uses of Buddhism, 21:4; and Alkire on the concept of order in Southeast Asia, 14:4. Other examples, particularly in situations of conflict, include Clendinnen on the Maya, 22:3; Marino on Neapolitan society, 24:2; and Felstiner on family metaphors in the South American independence movements, 25:1.) Wilson's essay deserves to be read with special care as an exceptionally sensitive treatment of such complex processes.

One implication of Wilson's myths is that the meaning of time is cultural (see Wylie on historical time in Dominica and the Faroe Islands, 24:3; and note Henige on the dubiousness of translating African memories into a Western calendar, 18:4), and that is a point of Peter Rigby's article. In this, of course, he echoes anthropology's concern to exorcise ethnocentrism. But Rigby finds previous approaches wanting, and in order to clear the field for a fresh approach he begins—in the familiar style of twentieth-century intellectuals—with a critical history of Western understanding of historical time. Intransigently Marxist, Rigby seeks the roots of the Ilparakuyo's concept of time in their social formation and mode of production. Yet, like Wilson with his mythic narratives, Rigby insists on seeing others' perceptions from the

inside while distrusting the methods of Western rationalism (from Hume and the Enlightenment through categories of functionalism and distinctions between synchronic and diachronic analysis). The result is a tour de force in which techniques of Western analysis explicate a non-Western mode of thought.

THE LIMITS OF ETHNIC POLITICS. If political democracy, or an imitation of it, has been tried nearly everywhere in the twentieth century, democracy's limitations and fragility have been almost as widely demonstrated. Again and again it has been necessary to ask why a system that depends upon mobilizing competing interests finds some cleavages fatal—those of ethnicity and class being most commonly cited. Recent work has emphasized the special difficulties of new states in formerly colonial territories, where the acquisition of political power is likely to mark the formation and not just the expression of class differences. (See Adas, 23:2; Somers and Goldfrank, 21:3; and Rambo, 19:2 on peasant protest; Samoff, 21:1, on administrators as a class in Tanzania. For the additional complications accompanying transformation to capitalist agriculture, see Herring on Pakistan, 21:4; Winson on Latin America, 25:1; and Tardanico on Mexico, 24:3.) Nigeria, where the tragedy of ethnic and regional conflict has won the world's attention, presents a special challenge to an emphasis on class. Nevertheless, Larry Diamond's study—which invites comparison with and makes effective use of the literature on patron-client relations (see Eisenstadt and Roniger, 22:1), regionalism (Horowitz, 23:2), and ethnic conflict—builds to the firm conclusion that Nigeria's divisions were made so destructive by the process of class formation through politics.

In our century, then, any failure of class and ethnic differences to become critically divisive takes on a special interest. And explanations of why in the United States no strong fascist movement developed, like explanations for the absence of an effective socialist party, most often use the familiar categories: in America the cleavages of class and ethnicity cut across each other. Peter Amann finds support for such a view in his skillful account of the Black Legion, whose failure makes it almost funny fifty years later, despite its similarity to many other movements in the 1920s and '30s. Ultimately, however, an explanation of its rapid collapse requires something more (Keller, 22:3, also takes a broader view in comparing the United States and Britain in the same period) and that, Amman argues, lies in the inherent limitations of nativist movements. Anti-black but also anti-Catholic, their appeal was narrow; and adolescent secrecy limited their effectiveness. More important, violent though they were, they could not reject the political system that was the only one they could imagine and the center of their claims to patriotism. That an ill-formed subculture was sterile because in some sense it was loyal to the larger culture it attacked, suggests the importance of the cultural myths within which men act, kill, and fail.