Editorial Foreword

THE POPULAR CULTURE OF HISTORY. Calls for history from the bottom up suggest a point of view but leave open the questions of method and purpose. The most common implication is that historians, using the familiar methods of social history, should seek to discover the interests shared and values held by the poor, who might otherwise be left among the people without history. Eric Wolf's memorable title refers, however, to non-Western societies and includes an anthropologist's sensitivity to culture. Reflecting that broader concern, essays in this section bear on social history and focus on those at the bottom of society. But the history they seek to reconstruct is less the social history known only when scholars write it than the historical accounts created by people of limited literacy to convey some coherent understanding of the changes affecting their lives. These mythic and insightful histories, often also a call to action, function on many levels at once. Using tools of psychology and social history, Eric Van Young probes the shadowy biography and absurd claims of a peasant agitator. Behind general symbols given distinctive meanings, underneath ambivalent descriptions and contradictory accounts, beyond implications of racial conflict and mystical power, he uncovers a picture of how in Mexican society history was thought to work (on related issues in Mexican history, compare Clendinnen, *CSSH* 22:3, and Finkler, 25:2). Paul Greenough argues that elite and popular cultures are likely to intersect when they identify historical turning points, and he suggests that a catalogue of how social order is thought to be threatened would reveal a society's view of itself. He then uses those points to uncover a difference in Western and Eastern thinking about historical crises that helps explain the special place of biography in Indian historical writing and of great leaders in Indian politics (on diverse conceptions of historical time, see Wylie, 24:3, and Rigby, 25:3). Majid Siddiqi contrasts the linearity of historical narrative with the useful legends and flexible chronology of popular accounts which provide an ideological context while serving a political purpose. Important in Indian culture (note both Freitag and Yang, 22:4), such historical myth-making is at the core of most millenarian movements (see Kitzinger, 9:1, on the Rastafarians; Kuhn, 19:3, on the Taiping rebellion; Sharot on Jewish millenarianism, 22:3). More generally, these imagined histories tell a great deal about how a people chooses its heroes and understands its fate.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF REVOLUTIONS. No category of social comparison has been more systematically explored than revolution. In some respects that is surprising, for revolutions are as varied in context, cause, significance, and outcome as other large historical processes. Nevertheless, the challenge of tying specific events to theories of social transformation has proved all but irresistible. Although the results have been mixed, the best comparisons of

revolution stand among the most widely cited of historical studies. The essays in this section, however, make their contributions to a familiar subject by approaching it rather differently. These are not comparisons of revolutions as a special type of political event but essays about the context of change within which revolutions have occurred. Tom Garvin is thus led to look at a long-term process of revolutionary change interwoven with the peculiarities of Irish nationalism rather than at a single set of revolutionary events. Revolution in Ireland, he argues, was a by-product of modernizing changes most nationalists regretted. His study thus invites comparisons but in categories other than revolution. Like the earlier articles in this issue, his discussion of Ireland emphasizes the important and active use of folklore. The nationalists' dependence on a forceful British response and on opinion outside Ireland also recalls colonial experiences elsewhere as does the use of nationalism to bring together groups who had in common only their discontent. Backward-looking nationalists who become revolutionaries are not unique to Ireland (see Akhavi on Iran, 25:2, and Wilson on Japan, 25:3). Of modern revolutions, none is more directly tied to promises of economic and social development than Castro's Cuba. And those claims prompt Susan Eckstein's extraordinarily careful assessment of the kinds of changes that have taken place. Her findings become a measure of the continuing constraints of world capitalism and of the limitiations imposed by Cuba's dependence on Soviet assistance, but they show, too, that revolution can still make a difference. More than mere propaganda underlies the impact of Cuba on Central America (compare Smith on Guatemala, 26:2). When revolutions are seen in terms of accompanying changes rather than as a particular kind of social process, it becomes possible to imagine a narrative history of revolutions. That possibility has struck John Gates, and he tries it out on the past several centuries (contrast Nadel, 2:4, as well as Hermassi, Skocpol, and Zagorin—all in 18:2). Imperial ambitions, colonial resistance, and revolutionary ideology all have a place in his account, but military history provides the framework. A shifting balance between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces, itself the result of broader historical changes, alters not only the chances for revolution but its nature. Like war, revolutions are different in different periods. This, then, is neither the history that social scientists commonly compare nor that which the people imagine.

CSSH DISCUSSION. Three topics very much in vogue—social symbols, ritual space, and daily life—all meet in the study of domestic housing, so that it comes as something of a surprise that the subject has not been more fully explored. Problems of method and vocabulary remain, and Frank Brown addresses these; but his research also suggests an historical periodization based on the placement of the parlor—from the seventeenth century, when it moved from the back to the front of the house, to its demise in the twentieth century (see Lawrence, 24:1).