

# Editorial Foreword

APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL COMPARISON. Comparison in the social sciences, like virtue, is better practiced than discussed, for theories of how to accomplish either tend to be deceptively simple or impossibly hortatory whereas the attempt to think comparatively or to behave virtuously has merit however flawed the result. CSSH in particular has given more attention to practice than theory, emphasizing new research selected for its intrinsic quality and seen as comparative in a variety of ways, including its contribution to those dialogues across fields and disciplines which raise scholarship above pedantry. Any social phenomenon can be seen in terms of many standard categories of analysis, each of which invites a particular set of comparisons. And through comparison a single piece of research can use new knowledge of an event or group to add to our knowledge of kinds of situations and behavior, to pose fresh questions, to exemplify methods and set standards for their use, and sometimes to amend old models or create new ones and to build toward general theory. A contribution to comparative theory begins with the way an author understands his subject and extends beyond his own uses of comparison to the comparisons his readers choose to make. In CSSH some of these possibilities are suggested by grouping articles in broad categories, in tracing paths to other articles in these editorial forewords, and in listing still other connections in the indices (published at the end of volumes 11, 15, and 20).

Although belief in the value of comparison was part of the covenant on which sociology and anthropology were founded, historians have generally been more ambivalent about its possibilities (but note Bock's discussion of Henry Maine in 16:2). The American Historical Association's choice of comparison for the central theme of its annual meeting in December 1978 might therefore have seemed the symptom of a suspicion largely overcome, and it provided the occasion from which many of the papers published in this section developed. Even so, these comments on historical comparison by three sociologists and two anthropologists (most of whom have previously published in CSSH) are likely to temper any easy optimism about the present state of comparative study. Each paper sturdily reflects its author's discipline. E. A. Hammel's sensible and unpretentious assessment finds a century-old problem of anthropology still without any simple resolution. Characteristically, perhaps, the sociologists are more convinced of progress; Victoria Bonnell sees historical sociology as promisingly new (compare Neumann on comparative politics, 1:2), and Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers can even diagram its forms. Most readers, however, are

more likely to recognize themselves and the problems they encounter in the essay by Bernard Cohn, whose thoughtful wit reveals, as wit so often does, a certain skepticism of others' claims, a skepticism produced in this instance by applying the methods of anthropology and of history to what anthropologists and historians do. Finally, Henry Wright and James Lang review some recent studies cast in terms of comparisons now classic, and in doing so they raise questions about those established and familiar frameworks themselves. The analysis of historical comparisons leads also to problems about the nature of evidence, a subject Sylvia Thrupp will treat in a later issue.

**THE STATE AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE.** Outbursts of violence attract social scientists the way volcanic eruptions draw geologists, as specific events inviting measurement that promise to reveal subterranean forces which may in turn reflect still more basic structures. David Arnold casts his study of railroad strikes in India in the familiar framework of labor unrest (citing Rimlinger and Morris, 2:3), then extends the analysis from working conditions to class, cultural attitudes to ethnic conflict, and colonial control to the role of the state, causing these major themes of contemporary analysis to illumine each other and revealing the state to be a source of the violence it seeks to control. His exemplary historical analysis is followed by Sammy Smooha's equally rich use of the methods of political science in a systematic comparison of the sources of violent conflict in two divided states, Israel and Ireland (both among the samples treated in Price's discussion of terrorism, 19:1), explaining their containment in one but not in the other (note Tessler and Rosenfeld on minorities in Israel and North Africa, 20:3). Here, too, differences of wealth and religion shape the terms of conflict and define the state's opportunity. As a surgical form of compromise, partition often appears the statesmanlike solution to such problems; but Aaron Klieman's study of an earlier partition shows how little policymakers may understand of the societies they dominate and how indifferently they may form their policies, especially from the protective distance of colonial authority. In Ireland, Israel, and India the infrared light of violence does expose social elements normally obscured.