

Editorial Foreword

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. Since the Enlightenment at least, there has been an inclination to see in social violence an important indicator—the measure of a society's moral tenor (or national character), of the level of discontent within it, the strength of its government, or the nature of its legal system (this last, especially, has received attention in *CSSH*: 13:1; 14:1; but also 4:1, 5:4, 7:2, 8:1). But contemporary experience as well as contemporary social science can find in violence a sudden brief illumination, like a flashbulb exploding in a dark, crowded street, of more ordinary social relations, of networks of social control, and of resistance to them. The two studies by Marvin Becker and Barbara Hanawalt have implications for theories of state-building and the transition from medieval to modern; more simply, they invite a series of comparisons among urban and agrarian societies and across time.

COMMUNAL POLITICS. These articles are in one sense concerned with aspects of revolution, exemplifying and amending some points made in the last issue of *CSSH*. Lynn Hunt's carefully constructed analysis also provides suggestive links to the analysis of the use of ceremonial space by Mona Ozouf (17:4) and to that by John Markoff of the demand for bureaucracy (17:4) in the French Revolution. Taken together, however, the articles by Lynn Hunt and Dean McHenry point to the importance of local centers for political mobilization. Like David Barkin and John Bennett (14:4) and Edward Hansen and Eric Wolf (9:2), they find there a critical intersection of national policy and local interest, of social and economic and political structures.

AFRICAN SLAVERY. Slavery, even before Max Weber be it noted, was an obviously provocative topic for comparative analysis; and *CSSH*'s authors have made their contributions to a continuing discussion (2:1, 6:3, 8:3). More recent and deeper study of African slavery has underscored the fact that the forms and social implications of slavery can vary considerably. By viewing practice in terms of political theory,

D. A. Strickland nicely complements earlier essays, especially those of B. G. Haycock (7:4) and Ali Mazrui (9:3); and Polly Hill's meticulous study sensitively uses new evidence to enrich our understanding of how the institution of slavery can be as diverse and perhaps almost as flexible as institutions easier to admire.