English summaries

**Witty Devil: Laughter in the Middle Ages
as seen from Hagiology**   L. MOULINIER

As a passion of the soul expressing itself loudly through the body, laughter was generally held in great suspicion by the medieval Church, especially in monastic life, where it was considered as the enemy of silence and seriousness.
   Comical elements in edifying texts, telling of the life of an abbot and an abbess in the perspective of their canonizations, are all the more surprising. This study intends to analyze the function of such episods in hagiographic narrative (on the basis of two twelfth-century Vitae, *on Bernard de Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen) and the mechanism and scope of a certain type of laughter in the Middle Ages.*

**Bursts of Laughter. The Skullcap Regiment or Aristocratic,
French Merrymaking Strategies (1702-1752)**   A. DE BAECQUE

This study explores the case of a group of "laughers" which was particularly active during the first half of the 18th century, the Skullcap Regiment. This group, while reaffirming its aristocratic cultural heritage, sought to play the role of jester in the king's court. The Skullcap Regiment also occupies a particular place in the literary scene of the time, fighting against the "vulgarity" of the farce and the grotesque and opposing the tragedians and the academics in the name of a reasoned and guarded use of laughter. Finally this study focuses on the rituals practiced by this group of merrymakers: initiations, invectives, punitive expeditions; it is by way of this particular ceremony that the group forges an identity: that of "bel esprit".

Social History and Historical Events: for a New Approach   A. SUTER

By radically altering the conditions of life in Russia, the whole of Eastern Europe, and Germany, the so-called "Wende" of 1989—that is, the fall of communism— reminded us that historical events can sometimes give rise to vast structural changes. At the same time it refuted some of the very basic theoretical and methodological assumptions of social history. In fact, social historians had for a long time adopted a reductionist view of historical events. In sharp contrast to nineteenth and early twentieth century historians, they had argued that historical events were virtually predetermined by existing structural conditions and thus were neither autonomous nor capable of bringing about structural change. Being considered no more than "surface phenomena" (Fernand Braudel), historical events had lost, as far as social

history was concerned, their status as privileged objects of historical analysis. How then, taking this recent experience of 1989 into account, do events come about? What constitutes their autonomy and their power to change structures? How should the story of an event be written, after all? For the reasons just outlined, social historians have not yet come up with very convincing answers. One wonders therefore whether we all ought—as some "revisionist" historians already have— to return to the former methods and answers of historicism. This article strictly rejects such an option. Instead, it attempts to develop theoretical and methodological alternatives which better suit social historians.

Constructing African Americans as Minorities   E. LEWIS

Long before American blacks became viewed as racial minorities, many white Americans viewed them as the embodiment of danger. Through the Civil War, some whites feared slave uprisings and other acts of resistance, while others knew that in some places blacks constituted numerical majorities (the antithesis of minorities). Moreover, blackness marked African Americans as slaves and thus of a subordinate status. As long as these perceptions existed, excluding Reconstruction, few whites considered blacks worthy of basic civil rights. It was not until the 1950s, in fact, that scores of Americans accepted the argument advanced by many African Americans that they were injured citizens. Once constructed as such, it became possible to be perceived as racial minorities with legitimate social, political, and economic claims on the nation. Thus as this essay traces, African Americans were socially constructed as minorities within the context of their protracted fight for full citizenship rights.

Discriminating Difference:
The Postcolonial Politics of Caste in India   N. B. DIRKS

This paper is about debates and controversies surrounding the use of caste for reservations and positive discrimination in postcolonial India. Beginning with the furor over the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, the paper traces ways in which arguments about caste as a classificational system have referred to the political domain, both in the sociological representations of caste as a social system, and in the uses of caste for specific political purposes. The important sociological work of G. S. Ghurye figures significantly, as do subsequent transformations of Ghurye's work by contemporary sociologists. The paper builds on previous work arguing that caste in India has always been political, and suggests that the postcolonial conviction that caste should be consigned to a private domain has been a bourgeois fiction following some of the same logics as those around the question of women, as argued in a different context by Partha Chatterjee. The paper concludes with a reflection about the politics of historical and sociological writing, as also about the ways in which these politics can change from colonial to postcolonial times.

Aboriginality, Race and the State: The Minority Debate
and National Hegemony in Australia   A. A. YENGOYAN

This paper examines the status of Aboriginal Australians in relation to post-contact history and the development of the national Australian State. Traditional Aboriginal

essentialisms of blood and land persist across this time span and define critical arenas in which cultural, economic and political aspects of the contemporary minority debate occur. The long standing silence on the role of the Aboriginal populations within this history of Aboriginal and European contact is being broken by both Aboriginals and scholars. It is argued here that blood (race), and the spirituality which Aboriginals endow to place and space—land—are traditional cultural foundations that provide the basis of Aboriginality as an ideology and a highly visible political culture. Blood is a pivotal, essential and irreducible factor in what constitutes Aboriginality; land is the source of all being and existence, and the return to ancestral lands and tracks is vital for all Aboriginal peoples. Thus, land rights issues and policies, most recently the "Marbo" decisions, are at the center of the assertion of Aboriginal identity and political activism and are manifest at local, national, and global levels, and it is local essentialisms, such as blood and land, which cement and bind societies to their past and define their future.

Privileged Spaces: Agricultural Productivity and Urban Provisioning Zones in Pre-Industrial Europe G. GRANTHAM

Urbanized regions constituted the privileged economic space of pre-industrial societies. It was here that the gains from the division of labour were most fully realized. This paper investigates the question whether agricultural productivity set an effective limit to the extent of such gains of constraining the size of pre-industrial cities. Simulations of the provisioning regions for cities of different sizes using contemporary input coefficients indicate that zones defined by direct marketing of produce by farmers could readily support cities up to 250,000. The binding constraint on cities below this size was demographic; above this size it was the cost of organizing a stable long-distance trade in foodstuffs. Productivity was highest within the zone of direct marketing. These findings suggest that pre-industrial agricultural productivity was determined more by commercial opportunity than autonomous technological change.

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