

# Editorial Foreword

**REGIONALISM.** Often treated with gentle indifference as if it were a form of social senility, regionalism is now getting another look. Even twenty years ago most seers were confident that automobiles, radio, and television would soon accomplish what railroads, newspapers, and public schools had not: the elimination of distinct local cultures and loyalties. Once again social scientists must follow (and debate, see Hechter and Sloan in *CSSH*, 21:1) the headlines, which declare the importance of regional ties in even the most advanced societies; but more than that, their disenchantment with the state and state-building, their attention to the vitality of popular culture, and their recognition of the irregularities of social change have given new interest to an old topic. The three essays in this issue explore the subject in very different ways. Peter Gourevitch uses a broad, comparative approach to delineate the combination of interests that nowadays make the region an effective unit for political mobilization (and one that fits the argument of Hansen, Schneider, and Schneider, 14:3). The omnipotent state is here merely the core; and change, by shifting the balance between center and periphery may reinforce rather than submerge, demands rooted in regional culture and economic needs. Carl Pletsch uses categories of anthropology and semiology to analyze the connection between policy and ideology in the two Germanies (a much tighter fit in the GDR than Murphey had in mind for China and India, 14:3); in this view a bifurcated Germany ceases to seem transitory. Then Gary Hamilton turns to regional associations—a subject on which the contemporary literature is richer (see Jongkind, 16:4 and Skeldon, 19:4)—and begins from the difficult Chinese case to analyze the conditions that lead migrants to organize in terms of regional ties they have carried with them. In these political, cultural, and sociological analyses of diverse cases, economic changes give new utility to old loyalties; and as a result, the way is cleared for further consideration of what constitutes a region (compare Sumler on subcultures, 19:4) and whether the interlocking interests that give it definition are in fact more lasting or adaptable than the national states that long challenged and obscured its existence.

**THE SOCIOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY AND OF CRIME.** Most historians and anthropologists would agree in the abstract that the use of technology is a cultural matter despite (or even because of?) the rational analysis of physical reality so central to it. Yet when dealing with complex societies, both disciplines have generally been more effective on other topics (for

example, Katz, 15:3); and if most sociologists have turned away from the sociology of knowledge, that is not because the problems studied have been neatly solved (see Sklair, 13:2). W. G. L. de Haas' concise sketch and case study of a method for dissecting the cultural roots of technology is thus something of a tour de force. The importance and difficulty of the attempt is highlighted by Roger Lane's review essay which notes related pitfalls in the more frequently studied question of the social meaning of crime. In practice and theory the recognition of what "works" is socially conditioned. The assessment of how that conditioning operates can be as revealing as it is complex.

**DEBATE ON SOCIAL CLASS.** The terms of social class are commonly used so loosely and carry such ideological burdens that Peter Stearns' exasperation with slurred statements about the middle class seems sure to win at least one cheer from every reader (most of them themselves presumably middle-class professionals, whom Perlmutter and Halpern wrestled with in 10:1, 11:1, and 12:1). Yet so friendly a respondent as Lenore O'Boyle finds his categories not always clear, his focus too much on life style and values (he in turn resists her emphasis on political power). In this informed discussion, which takes most of its examples from nineteenth-century Europe, two historians are better able to agree on patterns of social change than on how concepts of class should be used. Richard Tilly establishes a similar position in his review of an important new comparison of salaried workers in Germany and the United States in the early twentieth century. Eighteenth-century Oaxaca would seem in contrast to be a simpler case and one in which distinctions between race and class were clearer than usual; yet John Chance and William Taylor's analysis has produced a powerful critique from Robert McCaa, Stuart Schwartz, and Arturo Grubessich. Their criticism and Chance and Taylor's reply bring real gains in methodological sophistication and clarity but leave opposing emphases in interpretation.

**AGRARIAN REVOLUTION.** Increased attention to peasant revolts (see the articles in 17:4 and 18:1), like the renewed interest in regionalism, illustrates many of the themes of this issue: the impact of contemporary events, the use of technology, and the analysis of class as well as a pattern of critical dialogue. Margaret Somers and Walter Goldfrank criticize Jeffrey Paige's *Agrarian Revolution*, particularly for the role it assigns to "social movements" and its slight attention to world politics in explaining revolutions in agrarian societies. They take a brief look at Angola as an example of their points; Mark Traugott, on the other hand, in a meticulous study of the Kwilu Rebellion finds Paige's concept quite useful but would amend Fox, de Craemer, and Ribeaucourt's account (8:1) to give greater attention to economic factors.