

# Editorial Foreword

*Defining Difference.* Of all the accomplishments that societies share, none is more universal than discrimination. Its sources and forms are crucial matters, and no topic has proved more fruitful. Lasting empirical research and influential social theories have resulted from the effort to explain how societies come to ascribe high and low status to particular groups and how they construct ethnic identity as primordial difference. (On theories of ethnicity, see in *CSSH*: Wilkie, 19:1; Bentley, 29:1; Bromley and Koslov, 31:3; Shanin, 31:3). For all these achievements, which expose inner social processes expressed in daily practice, the questions about social discrimination remain discouragingly current and excitingly controversial. The four essays in this section continue conversations that have been prominent in these pages and, different as they are, have in common their effort to effort to bridge the growing gap between structural and cultural explanations, their impressive and careful application of fresh research, and their effective use of unexpected comparisons. Antonia Finnane studies the Subei, one of China's most disparaged ethnic groups, to ask how they acquired an ethnic identity (see Harrell, 32:3). Finding custom and language insufficient explanations, she argues for the importance of a process of structural dominance and finds a stimulating comparison in English-Irish relations, using Hechter's ideas about internal colonies and Macauley's inexhaustibly elegant expressions of prejudice (some other cases for comparison are presented by Lane, 17:2; Kahn, 20:1; McGilvray, 24:2; Horowitz, 23:2; Sider, 29:1; Klein, 34:3; Goldin and Rosenbaum, 35:1). These structures, however, have a deep history; and Finnane uncovers its development from the particulars of geography and economic conditions to national politics and educational policy.

Michael Lambert starts not with structures but an idea, studying one of the most influential ideologies of colonial liberation, the concept of *négritude*. His study of its intellectual, social, and psychological origins will come as a shock to many as it dissolves oppositions (between assimilation and ethnic pride, Frenchness and African culture) that much contemporary discourse assumes to have been fundamental (French attitudes and theories are also discussed by Lewis, 4:2; Clifford, 23:4; Pletsch, 23:4; and Kelly, 26:3). Difference had to be discovered. It can also be constructed, as Robert Jackson and Gregory Maddox demonstrate in their comparison of Cochabamba, Brazil, and the Gogo of central Tanzania. Dissimilar in economy, polity, and culture, the two cases all the more effectively illustrate how socio-cultural difference can be assembled, more from experience than custom—from the complexities of daily life as shaped by systems for controlling labor and levying taxes. This, too, then is a study of colonial dominance and social change (on the delineation of difference in colonies and former colonies, see Chance and Taylor, 19:4, and the subsequent debate, 21:3; Samoff, 21:1; Kratoska, 24:2; Diamond, 25:3; Hind 26:1 and 26:3; Rothstein, 28:2; Rutz, 29:3; Stoler, 31:1 and 34:3; Pigg, 34:3; and Ekeh, 32:4). Difference is identified and amplified in a process that changes the categories of social perception, engages culture but also manipulates it. The construction of difference, however, is not just imperial nor always informal, its victims or beneficiaries not only colonials, as S.R.S. Szreter demonstrates by comparing the categories of social status in the official statistics of Britain, the United States, and France (compare Newby, 17:2; Heper, 27:1; Borneman, 30:1;

Woolf, 31:3; and Linke, 32:1). He wonders why the Anglo-American and French approaches should be so different and finds the answer in a remarkable account that combines an intellectual history of demography and a social study of the elites who linked social science and official statistics. Whereas Finnane, like Jackson and Maddox, found apparently cultural differences largely formed and drawn by structural pressure, Szreter shows how seemingly objective descriptions of status differences were the expression of cultural attitudes based on belief in social science, visions of eugenics, and fears of immigrants as well as the organized interests that lobbied for public health and labor policy and the general experience of industrialization and the Great Depression. Social difference is constructed from the categories society imposes in order to comprehend itself.

*Environmental Planning.* Among its many effects, contemporary concern with ecological issues has stimulated a subfield of history which now produces research more sure-footed than most environmental assessments. This work discovers, as growing fields of history always do, all sorts of previously unrecognized connections among ideas, institutions, and interests (see Melville, 32:1; Katzman, 17:3; and Kottak, 14:3); and it widens our horizons in other ways. Environmentalism, Richard Grove demonstrates, is not so recent nor so much a product of American experience as many assume; and it has a global history in which European expansion and native practice sometimes intersected for more than exploitation. Grove offers a fascinating intellectual history of environmental awareness, noting the contributions of the Renaissance (and its classical roots), seventeenth- and eighteenth-century naturalists, the physiocrats, Rousseau, romanticism, and early nineteenth-century science. He shows its connection to social programs for the abolition of slavery and public health and, above all, the changing conceptions of what a state must do made possible and necessary by imperial rule. All societies, of course, use and abuse their environments; but many, in the tropics or North America for example, have also had to deal with problems of overabundance. As Jonathan Wylie notes, economies dependent upon fishing invite comparison with hunters and gatherers (note Thompson, 27:1, on a different sort of fishing village); but he compares the Faroe Islands and Dominica, two societies whose differences have led him important questions before. His earlier topic (in 24:3), their sense of time and history, clearly looked to culture; but this one starts with an environmental cornucopia and probes differences in economy, society, and culture for an explanation of why an excess of fish in one place leads to redistributive order and in another to riotous near-anarchy. Among all the important factors, cultural elements, including different conceptions of God and nature, once again seem fundamental. Those cultural differences, however, turn out to have changed over time; and so have the ways of dealing with marine bounty. The practices of reciprocity, patronage, and equality have proved impermanent; Dominica used to have a functioning system for the distribution of great catches, and the Faroes once knew disorder. Wylie's explanation of these changes thus becomes an important and more general assessment of social processes in which the economy, technology, and foreign interests reenter, as does the reconstitution of ideology to meet new needs. Ideas and environments interact as complexly as structure and culture.