

NEWSLETTER OF THE
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SECTION SESSIONS IN D.C.

The program for the comparative historical sessions in Washington is as follows (all on Friday, August 30th):

- 8:30 a.m. - Council meeting (council members only)
9:30 a.m. - Business meeting (all members please attend)
10:30 a.m. - Comparative Historical Research and Contemporary Social Issues:

A Panel Discussion

Chair: Craig Calhoun, UNC Chapel Hill

Participants: Norman Birenbaum, Georgetown
Seymour Martin Lipset, Stanford
Stanley Aronowitz, City U of NY

- 2:30 p.m. - Comparative Historical Approaches to Social Movements

Chair: Craig Calhoun (UNC Chapel Hill)

Papers:

Maryjane Osa (U of Chicago): "Room to Maneuver: Church-State Negotiations in Poland, 1945-1978"

Jeffrey Haden (U of CA, Berkeley): "Selective Mobilization in Craft Protest"

William Regensburger (UCLA): "Racial Segregation of Production, Radicalism, and Insurgent Black Workers: A Historical Phenomenology of Multi-racial Unionism in the South"

Elizabeth Nichols (U of CA, Berkeley): "Skocpol on Revolution: Comparative analysis vs. Historical Conjuncture"

Discussant: Carlos Forment (Harvard U)

- 4:30 p.m. - Comparative Historical Studies of the State

Chair: David Zaret (Indiana U)

Papers:

Robert Antonio (U of Kansas): "Patronage and the Pre-Industrial State"

Said Arjomand (SUNY, Stony Brook): "The State and the Transformation of the Sacred Law in the Islamic Republic of Iran"

Stephen Valocchi (Indiana U): "The State and Welfare Politics in England, Germany and Sweden:

York Bradshaw (Northwestern U): "Peripheral States and Development: Black Africa in Comparative Perspective"

Discussant: David James

RESEARCH REPORT

Recent Works on Culture and History
Wendy Griswold
The University of Chicago

This review essay addresses two types of intersection among historical, sociological, and cultural analyses: it treats recent books on the history of culture that should be of interest to sociologists, and it discusses work in historical sociology which gives weight to cultural among other explanatory factors.

Three historical accounts of culture that I've come across recently command the attention of the sociologist because they demonstrate, in sophisticated and persuasive terms, how political, economic, and intellectual forces combine to produce cultural outcomes. The newest is Robert A. Ferguson's splendid book, Law and Letters in American Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). After demonstrating the immense social prestige and political power of lawyers in the early republic from the Revolution to the 1830's, Ferguson shows how they dominated the culture as well as the polity. An English professor at Chicago with a degree in law as well as American studies, Ferguson is interested in the literary impact of this configuration of law and letters, where men with legal training made up the bulk of both professional and amateur novelists, poets, critics, and editors, and he offers fascinating readings of canonical and all-but-forgotten works in light of their configuration. Sociologists will be especially intrigued by his account of how the social position plus world view of a tightly organized profession (lawyers interacted constantly as they rode the court circuit) generated both political and literary consequences. This book has all the earmarks of an instant classic; any discussion of either nineteenth-century America or the cultural role of the professions should take it into account.

Keith Thomas's Man and the Natural World is a more wide-ranging attempt to explain a cultural phenomenon, in this case the modern attitude (a combination of fondness, reverence, and guilt) toward animals, plants, and all of nature. Historical sociologists will already be familiar with Thomas's Religion and the Decline of Magic, wherein he delineates the conjunction of theological, psychological, and sociological factors to explain the witchcraft hysteria of the seventeenth century. The new book of this Oxford historian is similarly pluralistic, as Thomas tries to account for shift in attitudes toward nature in the early modern period, a shift from the anthropocentric view (nature exists only for human use and is something to be conquered) to the modern sense that animals and even trees have rights to existence irrespective of human utility, rights which must be considered if not always respected. This takes him into the histories of gardening, pets, vegetarianism, landscape painting, attitudes toward trees, conception of the wilderness, and conservation. Thomas's mastery of sources is overwhelming; his anecdotes are delightful; and his argument about a basic change in the Western mentality is compelling. This book belongs next to Aries and Braudel on your shelf of histories of the modern sensibility.

Francis Haskell's Rediscoveries in Art (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976) is the third history of culture that has a general sociological interest, in this case through its exploration of the relationship between markets and cultural innovation. The standard way of thinking about the impact of increased market activity on artistic innovation is pure demand-side economics: enlarged markets for artistic products produce differentiation and reward certain forms of novelty (see for example Michael Baxandall, The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany, or Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel). Haskell presents a case of the opposite occurring. Following the Napoleonic Wars, when there was both new demand on the part of commercial and industrial families with growing wealth, and new supply due to the need of some old families to dispose of their collections, the buyers were conservative in their preferences. Innovation, which in

this case meant the appreciation of early Italian painters like Botticelli or Giotto among others, took several decades to revive. And when it did, it was inhibited by the enthusiasm of the rather bohemian groups that initially supported it. Only when the early Italian painters were promoted as part of the evolutionary chain leading to Raphael and the Old Masters, were they generally rediscovered. Haskell is an Oxford art historian, but (like Baxandall) his sophisticated understanding of the interaction of economic history, intellectual motifs, and social competition, and their impact on art worlds, rewards the sociologist handsomely.

Since they are trying to explain specifically cultural phenomena, the preceding three books might be neglected by sociologists if not brought to their attention. The same cannot be said for studies where culture is used as a variable to help explain a historical outcome. One such book that will come to the historical sociologist's attention sooner or later is Chandra Mukerji's From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Mukerji contends that a materialistic culture, based on consumers' desire for certain goods capable of mass production such as printed cloth, appeared very early in the modern period (pace Weber). She sets out four case studies wherein printed objects (prints in books, maps and navigational aids, scientific drawings, and printed calico cloth) profoundly affected economic and intellectual patterns. Protectionism was the first response of the endangered local cotton industry, but since that failed to dampen the consumer demand, entrepreneurial innovations soon followed, and by the end of the century the British manufacturers dominated domestic and world markets. Materialism, even hedonistic consumption, thus preceded productive capacity associated with the Industrial Revolution. This thesis can and will be argued over, but it should certainly draw attention of those interested in the formation of industrial society.

Mukerji's enterprise clearly has much in common with the new history practiced by the Annales school and people like Robert Darnton or Natalie Zemon Davis. But like the old history about kings and wars, new histories and new sociological analyses of history can easily turn into Making Histories (Richard Johnson et al eds., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) or even The Invention of Tradition (Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). There is no easy answer to the methodological problems such titles suggest. Nevertheless, these two collections may at least help the sociologist keep alert to the fact that the past and present are by no means discrete domains; the latter is constantly trying to manipulate the former, and historical sociologists need to beware of becoming handmaidens to such inventions.

Member News

Paul Vogt (SUNY at Albany) is doing research for a book on a comparative historical sociology of governmental policies designed to foster religious, social, and political tolerance in western Europe and North America since the 18th century.

A Final Statement

from the Chair

Election returns are in. Dietrich Rueschemeyer assumes the chair as of this year's ASA meetings; Jack Goldstone and Craig Jenkins will join the council. The section seems healthy; its membership slide has been reversed. An important forum for scholarly discussions has been established. I look forward to continuing to serve the section as next year's Newsletter editor. Much appreciation is due to Barbara Laslett and Ron Aminzade who did yeoman service as this year's editors, despite late items from the chair and others.