

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE IDEA FOR THIS book was hatched on November 18, 2002, when I gave my inaugural lecture as the Sylvia L. Thrupp Collegiate Professor of Comparative History at the University of Michigan. In naming my chair (local custom asks collegiate professors to choose their own title by honoring someone connected to the University) I wanted to make a double statement. First, as well as being a pioneer of medieval social history, Sylvia Thrupp was a main instigator of the openness of historians to interdisciplinary and comparative analysis. The journal which she founded in Chicago in 1958 and brought to Michigan three years later, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, fostered a rare and challenging reciprocity between historical thinking and various kinds of social science. An unforced eclecticism, with a willingness to think comparatively across the disciplines, across fields, and across periods, was the hallmark of Sylvia Thrupp's editorship, and it came to describe the outlook of the Michigan History Department more generally. Her energy and acuteness of judgment made the journal into what it still remains, namely, the premier international showcase for historically inclined interdisciplinary scholarship across the social sciences. Second, Sylvia Thrupp came to Michigan as the first Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History, a chair originally endowed for a distinguished woman historian in the pre-affirmative action era when the presence of women in the profession was still so sparse. Though she'd retired by the time I arrived in Ann Arbor in 1979, I was lucky enough to get to know her via *Comparative Studies*, and I'm proud to be associated with her name.³

Immediately after delivering my lecture, I was urged by Phil Pochoda, Director of the University of Michigan Press, to consider converting my thoughts into a book and I've been enormously grate-

ful for that initial encouragement and subsequent support. In my immediate editor at the Press, Jim Reische, I've also been fortunate indeed. I wrote the book between October 2003 and April 2004 during a year's leave, which was made possible by a Guggenheim Fellowship and the associated support of the University of Michigan. Pete Soppelsa provided invaluable help at the final stage of the manuscript's preparation.

Still more crucial have been the various intellectual communities I've relied upon over the years, whose identity should be readily apparent from what follows below. Pride of place goes to the University of Michigan, both to my colleagues and graduate students in the Department of History and to the wider interdisciplinary culture fostered so uniquely by this University, whose crucible in many respects was the Program in the Comparative Study of Social Transformations (CSST) formed in 1987. I also thank my fellow German historians as well as my wider cross-disciplinary community in German Studies, who again include a remarkable group of colleagues and students at Michigan itself and an essential network of friends on either side of the Atlantic (and the North Sea). My final source of friendship, solidarity, and inspiration in this collective sense is the one absolutely crucial to the framing of the arguments for this book, namely, those who share my credo of engaged scholarship and intellectual work, who write the histories from which I learn the most (whether members of the historical profession or not), and who believe that history can and should continue making a difference.

In those three broad respects I owe so much that it becomes invidious to name only a small number of individuals. But for this particular book I'd like to acknowledge intellectual debts ranging from more recent exchanges to conversations now stretching across many years. I thank Lauren Berlant, David Blackburn, Monica Burguera, Antoinette Burton, Kathleen Canning, Jane Caplan, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Vinayak Chaturvedi, Becky Conekin, David Crew, Nick Dirks, Jessica Dubow, Atina Grossmann, Julia Hell, Young-sun Hong, Kali Israel, Jennifer Jenkins, Robin Kelley, Mike Kennedy, Marjorie Levinson, Alf Lüdtke, Terry McDonald, Kristin McGuire, Bob Moeller, Gina Morantz-Sanchez, Frank Mort, Dirk Moses, Rudolf Mrazek, Keith Nield, Sherry Ortner, Kathy Pence, Moishe Postone, Alice Ritscherle, Sonya Rose, Bill Rosenberg, Adelheid von Saldern, Bill Schwarz, Bill Sewell, Peggy Somers, Scott Spector, Carolyn Steedman, George Steinmetz, Uli Strasser, Ron Suny, Dennis

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I would like to thank Ruth Rosengarten for her generosity in allowing me to use her drawings for the cover art of this book. They express perfectly the essence of my purposes.

It should already be plain that my book offers more than just historiographical commentary. The cadence of its organization—from optimism through disappointment to reflectiveness and finally defiance—gives the game away. It also aspires to politics. Above all, it presents a statement of personal conviction. It makes an appeal to my fellow historians, both within the profession and without. Practice the historian's classic virtues, of course. Ground yourself in the most imaginative, meticulous, and exhaustive archival research, in all the most expansive and unexpected ways the last four decades have made available. Embrace the historian's craft and the historian's epistemologies. But never be satisfied with these alone. Be self-conscious about your presuppositions. Do the hard work of abstraction. Converse with neighboring disciplines. Be alive to the meanings of politics. History is nothing if not sutured to a pedagogy, to a political ethics, and to a belief in the future. Otherwise, as Stuart Hall once said at the end of a reflection on the meanings of popular culture, to be perfectly honest, "I don't give a damn."⁴