

JAH Forum

E. P. THOMPSON IN AFRICAN HISTORY

E. P. Thompson's influence on the writing of African history, especially in its Kenyan and South African concentrations, has long seemed so obvious that it has attracted little scholarly comment.¹ In this *JAH Forum* we host four historians who have been associated with very different elements of this anglophone tradition of historical writing. Peter Delius challenges the widely held view that the *Making of the English Working Class* (1963) was key to the emergence of rural social history at the University of the Witwatersrand, and that he was a champion of Thompsonian methods and arguments; John Higginson draws on the intellectual debates of working class history in the United States to restate its ongoing significance for southern African history; Luise White returns to *Whigs and Hunters* (1975) to ask why it is that Africanists have not taken up the intriguing relationships between the hunting and preservation of wild animals and the evolution of private property rights in land; and Derek Peterson draws on Thompson's last book, *Witness Against the Beast* (1993), to draw attention to the ways in which historians have ignored the political theologies of African nonconformism. These articles were selected from a workshop hosted by the University of Michigan in November 2015, with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which brought many of the assumptions and absences of African social history into productive focus; they map out a broad historiographical field and we anticipate that they will be followed by other works picking up on the problems and arguments of cultural and economic transformation that obsessed Thompson and many others.

1 A constrained exception is Frederick Cooper, 'Work, class and empire: an African historian's retrospective on E. P. Thompson', *Social History*, 20:2 (1995), 235–41. For a fuller account of the South African story, see Jonathan Hyslop, 'E. P. Thompson in South Africa: the practice and politics of social history in an era of revolt and transition, 1976–2012', *International Review of Social History*, 61:1 (2016), 95–116.