



Courtesy of The Newberry Library, Chicago.

on Menocchio's case in Italian archives. He was struck by the forgotten miller's plucky defense and his eccentric views, including a piquant version of the Creation: "All was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were angels." Where did Menocchio get his ideas? He refers during his trials to a dozen books, including Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the *Koran*. Yet, as Ginzburg demonstrates, Menocchio appropriated "remnants of the thinking of others as he might stones and bricks" to construct his own unique cosmology, held together by a mortar of temporal rural folklore. Ginzburg adroitly blends Inquisition transcripts (which, like modern screenplays, record gesture and tone as well as dialogue) with his own scholarly detective work to animate the stubborn miller's confusing, colorful personality. Ironically, Menocchio epitomizes the age upon which he left no mark: Like much of 16th-century society, he was reeling from the encounter between peasant culture and the written word.

**THE FRENCH
ENCOUNTER WITH
AFRICANS: White
Response to Blacks,
1530–1880**
by William B. Cohen
Ind. Univ., 1980
360 pp. \$22.50

For 200 years, France has enjoyed a reputation for racial egalitarianism that black American visitors, such as Richard Wright and Paul Robeson, have confirmed. Cohen, an Indiana University historian, traces the less well-known but deep historical currents of French racial bigotry. The first prolonged contact between Frenchmen and Africans, he notes, occurred on West Indian plantations in the 1620s and '30s. Popular travelogues by 15th-century traders and missionaries had already sparked impressions of black inferiority in most Europeans' minds. French owners of foot-dragging African slaves were quick to fuel such notions. Still, the first modern abolitionists were probably Frenchmen—the influential 18th-century Enlightenment *philosophes* Diderot, Voltaire, Montesquieu. But they saw history as the story of human progress toward the apex of European civili-

zation. They believed all men had equal potential. Yet by determining that Africans had failed to develop theirs, the *philosophes*, Cohen suggests, sealed a "separate and inferior destiny for the black race." The relatively free interaction between the races in colonial Senegal during the early 19th century did little to change French views. And the *philosophes'* doubts were soon supported by "scientific racism"—anthropologists claiming that "the Negro has a shortened forehead and a mouth that is pushed forward as if he were made to eat instead of to think." By 1880, Cohen concludes, French troops were marching into black West Africa, confident that, for the "savage" continent, "to be burned by France [was] to begin to be enlightened."

Contemporary Affairs

PRODUCTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES: Trends and Cycles

by John W. Kendrick and
Elliot S. Grossman
Johns Hopkins, 1980
172 pp. \$14.95

Covering 20 major U.S. industries—ranging from textile manufacturing to furniture making to printing and publishing—economists Kendrick and Grossman sift the statistical signs of America's economic deceleration. Cost-reducing technological advances, they note, accounted for about half the rise in productivity (here measured as the ratio of an industry's output to labor *and* capital input) from 1948 to 1966. Since then, plant and product improvements have abated, and the rate of spending on research and development has decreased. Also hindering business efficiency, say the authors, have been government-mandated paperwork and regulations; spreading unionization and worker demands for bigger benefits and fewer hours; and the entry, in greater numbers, of inexperienced women and young people into the job market. The authors eschew policy recommendations in this lean, technical study. But their detailed analysis has the advantage of allowing comparisons of performances by whole industries and by the companies within them. Kendrick's and Grossman's conclusions support the common wisdom: The penalty for low productivity (the rate of increase dropped