

## Letter from the Editor

Though not by design, this edition of *Central European History* has turned into the “media issue.” Two of the three main articles deal in some way with media-related themes, from the character of celebrity culture in the late nineteenth century to the significance of understanding the very material basis of the press and public sphere during the Weimar Republic. There is also a lengthy forum, “**Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere**,” which looks in particular at how two of the most (in)famous postwar scholarly debates about modern German history and the Holocaust played out in the media: the *Historikerstreit* (historian’s quarrel) that erupted thirty years ago in West Germany, and the contentious debate sparked by the publication exactly a decade later of Daniel J. Goldhagen’s best-selling study, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. Seven prominent scholars from four countries kindly agreed to participate in the forum: Richard J. Evans, Timothy D. Snyder, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, and Gerrit Dworok. Each brings different strengths, approaches, and areas of expertise to an extremely animated and fruitful exchange—one that not only provides useful insights into two memorable discussions about Germany’s fraught past and the more general issue of scholarly debates in the media, but also points out suggestive areas for future research.

Matthew Unangst’s “**Men of Science and Action: The Celebrity of Explorers and German National Identity, 1870–1895**” traces the growth of celebrity culture during the *Kaiserreich*, focusing in particular on the emerging celebrity of German overseas explorers from unification, a time when the empire had no colonies of its own, to the period following the establishment of a formal colonial empire in the 1880s. The article is most interested in the “selling” of these explorers by the new mass media, and in the “consumption” of their exploits abroad by an adoring male and female public. Relying on an intensive reading of firsthand *Reiseberichte* (travelogues), as well as popular periodicals from the period, Unangst focuses on the representation and reception of these explorers and their activities. In so doing, he demonstrates how public discourse gradually shifted from a focus on their scientific achievements to a greater preoccupation, following the onset of formal empire, with adventure and masculinity, nation and national identity. This discursive shift, Unangst argues, not only reflected and abetted the formation of a more chauvinist national identity—one that claimed German superiority over other imperial nations—but, just as important, also revealed growing unease about the enormous social changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization.

Heidi Tworek’s “**The Death of News: The Problem of Paper in the Weimar Republic**” takes a fresh look at price-related paper shortages in 1920s Germany and, more specifically, at the political consequences that that had for the popular press. Whereas much of the scholarly work in this area focuses on important issues such as censorship, this article draws our attention to the very tangible *material* basis of the public sphere and of knowledge transfer in the modern era—and, in so doing, to the political dimension of “materiality.” With an eye to developments in other countries at the time, especially in the United States, Tworek carefully demonstrates how the failure of the German government to solve the paper crisis, which had already begun during World War I, unwittingly

facilitated the rise of right-wing media magnates such as Alfred Hugenberg and Hugo Stinnes, whose papers and journals kept up a steady drumbeat against the young republic. Tworek argues that this fateful development—along with the government's failure to provide more sympathetic press outlets with a sufficient supply of paper (paper allocation was a practice that had also begun during the last war)—further undermined popular support for Weimar, thus providing yet another, but heretofore neglected, explanation for the demise of the first democracy on German soil: the failure of political leaders in Berlin to guarantee the very material basis necessary for maintaining freedom of the press.

The thematic “outlier” in this “media issue” is, in a sense, Katrin Schreiter’s “**Revisiting Morale under the Bombs: The Gender of Affect in Darmstadt, 1942–1945,**” which looks at the gendered experience of bombing during World War II. Making use of largely untapped interrogations conducted right after the war with Germans who had survived the devastating aerial bombardment of Darmstadt, Schreiter examines the evolution of gender roles that came about as a result of the bombing effort, not least by focusing on the often different reactions by men and women to the bombing campaigns. The sense of helplessness experienced by many male Darmstadters produced a “crisis of masculinity,” she argues. At the same time, women there assumed a variety of new roles that signaled a dramatic increase in female self-sufficiency—a development that began as early as the first wave of bombings in 1942. This is important, Schreiter suggests, because it was a harbinger of later postwar developments—the “hour of the women” *avant la lettre*, so to speak.

Besides speaking to the important issue of increasingly fluid gender roles during wartime, the article also contributes to the often acrimonious debate about alleged German victimhood during World War II—and thus nicely complements the issue’s featured forum on the *Historikerstreit* and the Goldhagen debate. Finally, the article has implications for another recent focus of scholarly discussion: the Nazi regime’s efforts to create a so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community). Describing the close communal bonds that supposedly emerged in the bomb shelters of Darmstadt, Schreiter paradoxically concludes that “the Allied machinery of destruction helped create the social bond that Nazi ideology had striven in vain to achieve.” It is worth noting that one of the books reviewed in this issue, Stephan Lehnstaedt’s *Occupation in the East: The Daily Lives of German Occupiers in Warsaw and Minsk, 1939–1944*, reaches a similarly provocative conclusion: the *Volksgemeinschaft* did not emerge in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, according to this *Alltagsgeschichte* of the German occupation forces, but “it was possible there to get much closer to the intended goal than [it was] in the Reich.” The extent to which a racial “people’s community” took shape in the Third Reich is also a focus of Joachim Häberlen’s fine featured review of Janosch Steuwer’s major study, “*Ein Drittes Reich, wie ich es auffasse*”: *Politik, Gesellschaft und privates Leben in Tagebüchern, 1933–1939*.

ANDREW I. PORT  
EDITOR